ROBERTO D'AUBUISSON: A RIGHT-WING LEADER'S RISE TO POWER

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TC 660H/TC 359T
Plan II Honors Program
The University of Texas at Austin

December 15, 2020

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the wartime actions and strategies of Salvadoran General Roberto D'Aubuisson, a prominent right-wing leader during the Salvadoran Civil War. Major D'Aubuisson was accused of numerous human rights abuses both directly and indirectly through his ties with paramilitary death squads and corrupt political regimes. The purpose of this work is to analyze how D'Aubuisson was able to rise to political prominence and amass significant influence during the war despite his alleged ties to illegal activities and human rights abuses. I use this analysis to determine how D'Aubuisson's role helped expose the weaknesses of the Salvadoran state, and what that meant for the future of the country in its post-war recovery. My primary research strategy is a qualitative analysis of historical documentation from various media outlets, such as newspapers and radio interviews, as well as U.S. and Salvadoran government archives and personal testimonials of Salvadoran citizens from the wartime period of 1979-1992. I use this data to piece together the various roles D'Aubuisson played in the Civil War and the circumstances surrounding his rise to power. By examining the personal, domestic, and global circumstances that allowed D'Aubuisson to rise to prominence El Salvador, I reveal the core issues in the country that have impacted its development.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family. My grandparents, mother, and cousin Jasmine have provided constant, unwavering support for me throughout my time with Plan II, without which none of this would be possible. I would also like to thank my father and his family, whose courageous journey from El Salvador inspired this work and granted me a happy life I may not have had otherwise.

Second, I would like to sincerely thank my advisors, Dr. Jonathan C. Brown and Dr. Molly O'Neal. Their guidance, patience, and constant support pushed me to grow not only academically, but personally as well as I embark on my career endeavors. Their genuine belief in my abilities has given me the confidence to pursue my dreams.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the instructors, advisors, and directors in the Plan II Honors Program as well as in the International Relations and Global Studies major. The knowledge and assistance I've received has set me on a path towards a wonderfully bright future.

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Introduction

Many countries face central issues within their economic, political, and social environments that prevent them from achieving at least some degree of peace. Instability in a state can lead to conflicts that devastate and worsen existing situations. When a state does not address or look to fundamental issues, it is difficult to achieve solace for its citizens. Often, the focus remains on repairing what the conflict caused, rather than what started it. However, it is not always simple to find what creates a war-torn country. In countries with a history war-torn conflict, a careful analysis of a prominent leader's rise to power can potentially reveal these fundamental issues. Instead of looking at what a country's war has caused, we can look at the circumstances and methods that allow for certain leaders to rise amid the conflict. These circumstances can be telling of a broader picture for a state as a whole.

To exemplify this idea, I have chosen an example analysis of a leader's rise among a violent conflict. From 1979 to 1992, El Salvador suffered from a brutal civil war that cost over 70,000 lives. Mass killings, forced disappearances, kidnapping, and torture became commonplace for over a decade, largely at the hands of right-wing death squads, or paramilitary groups that acted as subdivisions of the government's military forces. At the head was former-military major Roberto D'Aubuisson, a man who rose to great prominence in El Salvador and had significant influence over civilians, military forces, and the political right-wing. D'Aubuisson was accused of many human rights

abuses but maintained a prominent standing in El Salvador. He had an expansive following and maintained support despite consistent allegations of crimes. In looking at the circumstances in El Salvador before and during the war, and D'Aubuisson's own methods of influence, we can assess the broader, core issues of the country. By analyzing the ways in which D'Aubuisson secured and maintained power, we can understand why certain problems and situations still exist in El Salvador today, hindering its ultimate achievement of relative peace.

Part One: Instability– Foundations that Paved the Way for D'Aubuisson

The Salvadoran Left vs. the Salvadoran Right

Origins: The Salvadoran Oligarchy

El Salvador's political divisions that began in the late 19th century were a direct reflection of its domestic economic tensions. Although the country has certainly seen socioeconomic improvements in recent decades, a significant disparity in the distribution of wealth between the country's landowning and working classes has existed for over a century and a half (Nohlen). This income disparity is rooted in the existence of a group of families known as "Las Catorce Familias," (Fourteen Families)

who gained control of El Salvador's coffee production during the late 19th century (Haggerty). Though the number of families was closer to several hundred, the term was coined to identify a select number of landowners who profited from the sharp increase in coffee prices in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The value of coffee grew by 1100% and accounted for an average of 58.7% of the nation's income between 1880 and 1914 (Haggerty). El Salvador's agricultural economy allowed the Familias to use the significant wealth gained from coffee production to expand their economic control. For the next century, 60% of the nation's land, 50% of its income, and the entirety of its banking system would be in the hands of only a few thousand people ("Oligarchs and Officers"). "It's an oligarchy because these families own and run almost everything that makes money in El Salvador," said oligarch Jorge Sol Costellanos in a 1981 interview. "Coffee gave birth to the oligarchy…and economic growth has revolved around them ever since" (Hoeffel).

The country's dense population exacerbated social tensions. By 1980, it had the densest population in Latin America with 600 people per square mile. Approximately 26% of rural families did not own land and another 60.6% owned too little to support a family (Burke). What the *campesinos,* or peasant farmers, did own was mostly due to the country's feudalistic origins that granted them *milpas*, or small portions of land. With the majority of the nation's land and wealth in the hands of a few families, ideological division became deep. The asymmetric distribution of land ownership translated into an

asymmetric distribution of political power (Mason). The left became comprised of peasant laborers. The right became an amalgamation of wealthy aristocrats and military officers who helped oligarchs maintain and expand their landholdings. With the oligarchy's political objective of preventing a class war and the military's suppression of any challenge to the established order, decades of authoritarian rule ensued (LeoGrand, *Our Own Backyard* 43).

Origins: The Rise of Military Force

El Salvador experienced civil strife in the early 20th century due to the economic and political power of the Familias. Despite these prevalent divisions, however, the country was still a representative democracy as of 1841, and male citizens of all socioeconomic status were able to voice their oppositions to at least to some degree. It was not until El Salvador's first dictatorship that these voices would be stifled, and the military repression would lead to decades of suppression.

On December 2nd, 1931, the Salvadoran armed forces rose to power for the first time when it overthrew the country's first democratically elected President, Arturo Araújo Fajardo. The military appointed Fajardo's Vice President, General Maximilliano Hernández Martínez, as Acting President. He founded the National Pro-Patria Party (PNPP), a far-right nationalist party that catered specifically to General Hernández's policies and rule. Despite promises to hold a nationwide legislative election in January of

1932, General Hernández, with the support of the oligarchs, canceled all election results after learning that the Communist Party of El Salvador had won several municipalities. Subsequent elections were cancelled, and Martinez targeted prominent communist leaders. These actions led to the formation of a peasant uprising, organized by communist activists. Amongst them was Agustín Farabundo Martí, a prominent leader who would inspire the formation of one of El Salvador's most prominent guerilla groups decades later.

The uprising of Communist supports and peasants occurred on January 22nd, 1932 in various cities across Western El Salvador and resulted in the killing of an estimated 100 people. Government forces responded with brute force, killing an estimated 30,000 peasants. The uprising, called "La Mantanza" (Massacre) marked the first instance of widespread military violence against the population and set the stage for decades of violence. The event certainly foreshadowed the later explosion of ideological tensions that led to the start of the Salvadoran Civil War in 1979, where mass killings would occur in far greater numbers.

General Hernández remained in power until 1944. Though elections still occurred, Hernández ran unopposed and results were often not publicized (Nohlen). This pattern of illegitimacy continued as military groups and leaders vied for power.

Enter the Political Parties: PCN vs. PDC

Following its first military dictatorship, El Salvador experienced years of shifting political leadership. All under military command, various political parties ruled for varying periods of time. By the 1970s, however, the National Conciliation Party (PCN) and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) had become El Salvador's first consistent political representatives. The PCN held the presidency from 1962 until 1979, but the PDC attracted consistent, widespread support and controlled numerous seats in the National Assembly as well as control over many municipalities (Montgomery 37). Tensions would come to a head in the 1972 election, when the PCN faced electoral defeat, and the conflict over who had won the election set the stage for the coup that started the civil war in 1979.

1960s Origins

The PDC was formed after the Communist Revolution in Cuba as an opportunity for the Salvadoran political system to find a balance between movements towards a leftist revolution and the continuation of far right-wing dictatorships. The party hoped to promote reform through moderate and Catholic-based policies (Montgomery 54). Originating as a faction of the PDC, the PCN split off in the late 1960s to promote more aggressive, conservative forms of social and economic policies in El Salvador. Though both parties were rooted in anticommunism and comprised of Christian Democrats, the PCN promoted more radical forms of counterinsurgency while the PDC retained a more centrist position. Both had strong support, and despite the PCN's majorities in terms of

National Assembly seat, number of municipalities, and popular votes for presidential elections, the PDC was never far behind. The party came within two seats of the National Assembly majority, maintained approximately a third of the popular vote, and governed the country's largest cities, including the capital, San Salvador (Webre). As political power struggles ensued, conflicts with Honduras exacerbated economic woes.

Economic Tensions

Amid the power struggles between political parties, the ruling elite maintained their power through widening class divisions. *Campesinos*, or peasant farmers, saw their landholdings dwindle by the mid-1970s. A 1965 minimum wage law practically abolished El Salvador's feudal system. The provision of *milpas* was discouraged, and the *aparcero* was "expected to become a laborer whose sole connection with the property that he worked on [was] the wage paid to him by the owner" (Browning). When Honduras imposed its own agrarian reform laws in April 1969, the landless population in El Salvador, having already risen from domestic policies, grew even further (Montgomery 76). The two countries were already facing economic tensions with El Salvador due to their having formed the Central American Common Market (CACM). The organization promoted free trade and economic integration in the region, but also caused Honduras to suffer from a trade deficit with its partners.

The negative state of affairs led to Honduras' realization that it was essentially subsidizing industrial development in El Salvador through the various economic reforms put in place by the CACM. This led to a mounting of frustration within Honduras, prompting agrarian reform legislation that forced 300,000 Salvadoran farmers out from the country (Bachmura). The farmers were notified that they had 30 days to leave the country, and with little land opportunity in their home country, El Salvador's class tensions were increased even further. Between 1961 and 1975, the percentage of landless rural Salvadorans increased from 11.9% to 40.9% (8). Since 58.5% of El Salvador's population were peasants, this meant that approximately 994,000 people, or almost one quarter of the population, were landless ("Rural Population").

The 1970 and 1972 Elections

Economic downturn in the late 1960's caused market prices for coffee to sharply decline, along with private investment. Sugar cane surpluses also rose as global demand fell, and drought and disease were rampant. International debt subsequently rose along with these troubles (Montgomery 60). Unemployment grew as well, and with regional tensions worsening economic hardships, the state of the economy prompted the National Assembly to call for a National Agrarian Reform Congress in January 1970. Both the PCN and opposition parties, as well as the president at the time General Fidel

Sánchez Hernández, had agrarian reform legislation on the agenda, and the events of 1969 prompted swift action.

The private sector members of the Assembly, who were part of the PCN, vehemently opposed agrarian reform. Delegates identified the concentration of land in the hands of few individuals as the major barrier to employment in the country. They favored "massive expropriation in favor of the common good" to promote the development of resources and increase employment (Economía Salvadoreña 109). Without the support of oligarch representatives, the majority of delegates believed increased peasant participation in the workforce required government restraint of *hacendados*, or owners of haciendas, as well as their allies in the Armed Forces (Economía Salvadoreña 114).

The progressive sentiments of the Assembly had the opposite impact in Salvadoran politics. Agrarian reform would not come up again until years later. When legislative elections were held two months later, the PDC lost 70 of the 78 municipalities it had won 2 years earlier, and its National Assembly seats went from nearly half to less than a third (21). Despite proven election fraud by the PCN, these significant losses prompted the formation of a coalition between the PDC and other opposition parties going into the 1972 election (*El Salvador: Significant Political Actors* 3).

UNO vs. PCN

In September 1971, the PDC formed a coalition with other Christian Democratic parties to form the National Opposition Union (UNO). Despite the more leftist beliefs of some of the members, the PDC was able to direct the party platform as it was the largest and most supported party of the three (Haggerty). The UNO's manifesto stated the following:

> We have a common goal capable of transcending the problem of differences of ideology and strategy; we desire a positive change in the existing structures of political and economic power which have demonstrated their injustice and have had a clearly retrogressive effect on our development. (Webre 158)

On the ticket for the new UNO party was José Napoleón Duarte, the mayor of San Salvador and a long-time member of the PDC. As was custom in his party, President Sánchez Hernández selected his successor to the PCN and leader of the army. He chose his chief of staff, Colonel Arturo Armando Molina.

The presidential campaign was dangerous for the opposition. Many UNO leaders claimed numerous incidents of harassment, kidnapping, and assault (Haggerty). In December 1971, unidentified assailants fired upon Duarte's campaign caravan and the driver in the lead car was killed. Tensions mounted as both sides feared for the opposition's victory, and this set the stage for election day. In San Salvador, where 30% of registered voters resided, Duarte won two to one, offsetting the PCN's stronghold in rural areas. The final counts differed from both sides. According to a 1984 CIA report over Salvadoran political actors, Duarte and the UNO had the clear victory directly based off electoral board counts. However, with pressure from the military to recount the

votes, the electoral commission claimed that without an absolute majority the election had to be deferred to the PNC-dominated National Assembly. Delegates declared Molina the winner, and this sparked a wave of mass unrest.

The 1977 State-of-Siege

Only weeks after the 1972 election, rebels within the military attempted a coup on then-President Sánchez, but with the majority of the military still in support of the government, it was unsuccessful. Having expressed support for the rebel regime, Duarte was then exiled from the country and sought refuge in Venezuela under their Christian-Democratic regime (Duarte 79). In the years after, social unrest worsened, and paramilitaries on both sides of the ideological spectrum formed. Ballot manipulation became more flagrant with each legislative election. Opposition parties declined to participate in the 1976 elections on the basis that it was "pointless" (Haggerty). Antigovernment demonstrations became more frequent, and the responses of the government grew more violent and repressive. On multiple occasions, the military fired upon protestors in the capital.

Elections were held on February 20, 1977, and the same pattern of fraudulency occurred. "Voting was impeded from early morning when the ballot boxes were found stuffed with ballots marked for the official party" wrote former Vice Minister of Defense Mariano Castro Morán, "…violence was used…to prevent voting, to stuff ballot boxes,

and to alter votes" (Morán). In a tape recording presented to members of the U.S. Congress, broadcasts by the PCN referred to election day as "stuffing tamales in the tanks," meaning "stuffing fraudulent votes in the ballot boxes" explained William Brown of the Washington Office on Latin America (Diuguld). Despite the physical removal of UNO poll watchers at various polling places, many locations still showed the UNO's candidate, retired Colonel Ernesto Claramount, with a high margin of lead (Duarte 197). The blatant fraud prompted the UNO candidates and 15,000 supporters to gather in the Plaza Libertad in San Salvador. After 3 days, the crowd had grown to more than 50,000, prompting the National Police to approach the scene in armored cars and to fire upon the demonstrators, leaving fifty dead (Montgomery 72).

After the events at Plaza Libertad, the government immediately declared a state-of-siege, which barred any Salvadorans from entering or leaving the country, placed news outlets under government control, and limited gatherings to three people or less. Colonel Claramount fled to Costa Rica, and PCN candidate General Carlos Humberto Romero was declared the victor ("6 Killed in El Salvador").

President Romero ended the state-of-siege upon his ascension into office in an effort to show support for increased attention on human rights in the country. In reality, however, his actions would prove to severely worsen the situation. In November of 1977, Romero had the National Assembly propagate the Law for the Defense and Guarantee of the Public Order, giving the government practically carte blanche arrest and

detention powers for any persons or act it deemed contrary to national interest or "against the existence and organization of the state" (DeYoung). After this order was put into place, the number of disappeared persons more than doubled, and political assassinations increased ten times (Bonner) and for the next two years, the tumultuous battle between the left and the right produced even more mass demonstrations, violence, and government repression (Montgomery 72).

Death Squads

As the rift between the left and right-wing factions of El Salvador caused political turmoil, civil violence expanded. The formation of paramilitary groups actually originated in the 1960s, deriving from US military policy beginning with President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress Initiative. Chairing a meeting of Central American presidents in March 1963, President Kennedy stated that "communism is the chief obstacle to economic development" in the Declaration of José and motioned for a military coalition between US and Central American forces to subdue communist influence (Nairn). The Declaration prompted a series of follow-up meetings between

Central American ministers of the interior, who held the jurisdiction over internal security and policing. The US State Department organized and held these meetings, with assistance from other departments such as the CIA, AID, and the Justice Department. William Bowdler, who represented the State Department at these meetings, described them as "designed to develop ways of dealing with subversion" (Nairn).

ORDEN and ANSESAL

The US, leading the creation of forces to subdue communism in El Salvador, assigned General José Alberto Medrano, a revered senior officer of the Salvadoran National Guard, to oversee the development of security forces in El Salvador (18). This led to the creation of ORDEN (Organización Democrática Nacionalista, or National Democratic Organization), a paramilitary and intelligence organization that was created to "use clandestine terror against government opponents" (Amnesty International). It operated primarily in the rural areas of El Salvador (Amnesty International). ORDEN was an auxiliary paramilitary arm of la Casa Presidencial, or the executive offices of the government, with the stated objective to "indoctrinate the peasants regarding the advantages of the democratic system and the disadvantages of the communist system," according to Medrano (Montgomery 50). ORDEN personnel in rural El Salvador gathered detailed information on suspected dissidents in rural El Salvador and sent this information to ANSESAL (National Security Agency of El Salvador), the presidential

intelligence service that relied on ORDEN's Death Squads as "the operative arm of intelligence gathering" (Nairn). According to Amnesty International, "innumerable reports" named ORDEN personnel as having assisted security forces in identifying, detaining, and murdering suspected "subversives" (Amnesty International). It claimed ORDEN was directly connected to hundreds of killings during this six-month period (Amnesty International).

Other Groups

The social and political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s prompted the formation of other right-wing paramilitary groups. After ORDEN came Mano Blanco (White Hand). Originating in Guatemala during the first decade of the country's Civil War in the 1960s, the group was, according to former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, Raul H. Castro, "an offshoot of ORDEN…the same people in ORDEN were to some extent the same people in Mano Blanco." (Nairn). Castro described Mano Blanco as "nothing less than the birth of Death Squads" in the country (Dickey, *Behind the Death Squads*).

Other death squads formed as well. The 1970s saw the formation of the White Warriors Union, with Roberto D'Aubuisson as the alleged founder (Brinkley). There was also the General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez Anti-Communist Brigade, the Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA), and the Anticommunist Wars of Elimination Liberation Armed Forces. According to the CIA, these death squads "made a public example of

their victims, who were often tortured to death or executed, and dumped in public places" and were considered "publicity seeking" (*Briefing Paper*). However, a great number of death squads existed that "used no title and, apart from the evidence of torture, left no indication of its responsibility" (*Briefing Paper*). The report also claimed that "most of those killed by right-wing death squads appear to be victims of this latter type" (*Briefing Paper*). Whether titled or not, these groups had essential characteristics in common: they were connected with army officers; they received money from various members of the oligarchy; and their members consisted of National Guardsmen and National Police, supplemented by ORDEN members, mercenaries, and members of the oligarchy (Montgomery 61). Rene Hurtado, the pseudonym for a former member of the El Salvador's Treasury Police, another offshoot of the government's security forces, recounted the following to journalist Allan Nairn:

> In general, you will kill the prisoners because there's an assumption they shouldn't live. If we pass them to the judge, they'll go free and maybe have to pick them up again. If there's lots of pressure—like from Amnesty International or some foreign countries—then we might pass them on to a judge, but if there's no pressure, then they're dead. When it's over, you just throw him in the alleys with a sign saying Mano Blanco, ESA, or Maximiliano Hernandez Brigade. (Nairn)

Though Death Squads gained prominence during El Salvador's war, they originated in the turmoil of the country in the decades before.

<u>D'Aubuisson—Before the War</u>

As the right-wing of El Salvador expanded and rose to greater prominence, a young soldier, Roberto D'Aubuisson, rose with it. After entering El Salvador's Escuela Militar in 1969 at the age of sixteen, his sister Marisa recalled that "for [her], Roberto was shaped and deformed" by the training (Andréu). She stated that upon graduating at eighteen, he was sent to the National Guard of El Salvador and subsequently was trained at the School of the Americas in both Washington D.C. and Panama. "We already knew what that was about: training the military to defend the issue of the Cold War," she explained, "I did not share in what the military and ORDEN were doing, Roberto was very close to that organization…we were all communists to them, the only ones who were right were the military, the oligarchies, and the private companies" (Andréu). Marisa described how his training and service allowed him to fully commit to his beliefs. After that, "he defended his arguments…forever" (Andréu).

After his attendance at the School of the Americas, D'Aubuisson rose to military prominence. A protégé of General Medrano, who described him as "a fine officer who was loved by the people" and one of "my tres asesinos" (three murderers, referring to Medrano's top 3 aides), D'Aubuisson rose in the ranks of the National Guard. He organized ORDEN chapters and eventually becoming Deputy Director (second in command) of El Salvador's intelligence agency, ANSESAL (Nairn). D'Aubuisson worked directly under ANSESAL's director, Roberto Eulaio Santivanez, whom a US embassy official called "President Romero's black man" for "taking care of people when there was

dirty work to be done" (Nairn). Santivanez was recorded saying in a previously-anonymous 1984 New York Times interview that D'Aubuisson was "the man who organized and [continued] to direct the squads" (Kinzer, "EX-AIDE IN SALVADOR"). He called him an "anarchic psychopath" whose "uncontrollable violence would consume El Salvador" (Kinzer, "EX-AIDE IN SALVADOR"). Journalist Allan Nairn described the Death Squad phenomenon as a "sprawling institution with tens of thousands of victims" that was the personal instrument of "one diabolical man," referring to D'Aubuisson (Nairn).

D'Aubuisson retained his position in ANSESAL until 1979. when the new junta dismantled the organization along with ORDEN for its ties to death squad killings under the Romero administration. However, this would not be the end of D'Aubuisson's reign over Salvdoran military intelligence. Only days after the dismantling, D'Aubuisson moved all of the files from ANSESAL to the junta's army headquarters, making copies for himself, and reorganized the institution under a new name, the National Intelligence Agency (ANI) (Montgomery 76). He would preside over this until creating his own political party, ARENA, in 1981. From this point, he would climb the ranks of Salvadoran politics, continuing the work he had started years before with ANSESAL.

Global Context: The Cold War

From 1948 onward, the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated global discourse, diplomacy, and military action. The primary

goal of U.S. foreign policy was to curtail the rise of communism and limit the spread of Soviet influence, while the Soviet Union sponsored leftist uprisings. Existing tensions between right and left ideologies in various regions, such as Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, were exacerbated as the two dominant global powers strove to keep the other's ideologic influence at bay. Countries that were already enduring social and political instability were used as proxy battlegrounds. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union prioritized the promotion of their ideological beliefs in already tumultuous countries. Despite the geographic origins of the conflict in Europe, the Cold War spread both fear and hope across the globe. In politically and socially unstable countries, especially where corruption ran rampant, those on the left saw an opportunity for reform and those on the right saw the potential for chaos ensue. The result was an ensuing battle of ideologies that led to extremism on both sides.

The JRG and D'Aubuisson's Attempted Coups

Throughout 1979, simultaneous advances toward revolution occurred in both Nicaragua and El Salvador. When the Sandinistas overthrew Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza in September 1979, a coalition of Salvadoran military officers felt they needed a stronger government to prevent a similar revolution from happening in El Salvador. Colonels Majano Ramos, Jaime Gutiérrez Avendaño, and three civilian PDC

members subsequently removed President Romero in a coup d'état on October 15, 1979. This was the start of El Salvador's Civil War.

The leaders established the Revolutionary Government Juna (JRG). They described themselves as a "reformist" junta with promises to instill expansive change such as agrarian reform, lower consumer prices, and increased wages (18). These reforms were designed to "take some of the steam away from leftist appeals to El Salvador's oppressed peasants and laborers" according to journalist Christopher Dickey ("Civil War in El Salvador"). In what would only be the first of multiple juntas, leaders took reaching steps in abolishing ORDEN, dismissing "hardliner" members of the National Guard, such as Roberto D'Aubuisson ("D'Aubuisson Once Called"), and creating a new human rights commission to curb paramilitary death squads. Though more moderate compared to other groups at the time, the JRG was still determined to curb leftist influence and committed atrocities via its own death squads. By the end of the month, the Army and National Guard killed over 100 civilians (Haggerty).

The first junta of El Salvador's war inevitably created a 3-sided conflict: on one side was the far-right, comprised of oligarchy members and hardliner military men who wanted to regain the control of the government; on another was the revolutionary guerillas of the far-left who called for widespread reform; and on the last was the PDC's moderate left and governing junta, who carefully tried to manage the desires of their extremist compatriots (Dickey, "Civil War in El Salvador"). With discord raging on all

sides of El Salvador, over half the members of the junta resigned, prompting the creation of a new ruling group under the JRG in January of 1980.

A month after the creation of the JRG's second junta, Major Roberto D'Aubuisson was arrested for defamation after publicly claiming El Salvador's Attorney General, Dr. Mario Zamora, was a liaison between the PDC and the Farabundo Marti Popular Liberation Force (FPL), a leftist guerilla organization ("Attorney General Files Charges"). Three days later, assassins broke into Dr. Zamora's home and killed him. The PDC and other popular organizations accused D'Aubuisson of masterminding the plot and were further convinced after he failed to show for testimony against the charge (Orellana). A month later, Archbishop Oscár Romero, an outspoken leader condemning right-wing forces, was assassinated while celebrating mass. Weeks after, a leftist revolutionary group claimed D'Aubuisson was plotting an attempted coup with oligarchs and military officials. The army consequently arrested D'Aubuisson along with other plot-members during a farm raid where the group was said to be planning their attempt. During the raid officials found documents directly linking D'Aubuisson to the organization of Archbishop Romero's murder (Bonner). Despite Colonel Majano's claim that the junta had evidence of D'Aubuisson's role in the crimes, an army major who was part of D'Aubuisson's *tanda,* or military class, was appointed to the case and released D'Aubuisson and his cohorts, claiming a lack of evidence (Bonner). When confronted on the issue, D'Aubuisson stated that a coup "would have a negative effect on both

[himself] and the armed forces" and that he and the other officers arrested "were only celebrating Soldiers Day" at the farm (Aldana).

D'Aubuisson had already made clear moves to organize the right against the junta. Along with other far-right figures, he organized the National Broad Front (FAN) to "present an alternative to the government… that [would be] more effective and responsible than what is being done" ("D'Aubuisson Forecasts Leftwing Violence"). He explained that allegations of a coup plot were simply "rumors" based on the junta not "bothering to hear alternatives" ("D'Aubuisson Forecasts Leftwing Violence"). However, shortly after his release from prison he was caught distributing a videocassette of himself to active military officers in which he accused the junta of "being sympathetic to communist guerrillas" and calling for a right-wing coup ("D'Aubuisson Once Called"). When it became clear that he would not achieve right-wing control by direct force, D'Aubuisson utilized other means to give the far-right a platform for power.

Part Two: The War and D'Aubuisson's 3 Points of Influence

1. Manipulation

Leaders often employ some degree of manipulation, adapting their rhetoric to attain positive sentiment from a group, often lying or framing their views to mislead. A degree of dishonesty may be deemed necessary for many reasons, but the core motivation rest in the perpetrator's belief that only they can do what is best, whether it be for the public or themselves. In order to gain a wide following, a person must find a way to make their views appealing to someone typically would not agree with them. Roberto D'Aubuisson employed this tactic greatly as he addressed his critics and the people of El Salvador. He claimed he only understood the necessary path to achieve peace and prosperity in the country. Taking advantage of the Western fear of communism that the Cold War created, D'Aubuisson used persuasive rhetoric to convince El Salvador's citizens that his nationalist beliefs were the only means save the country from destruction. He had various avenues through which he achieved this, and it allowed him to be seen as a great leader who is still revered by many today despite his now-proven ties human rights atrocities.

A Deep-Rooted Hatred for Communism

Within the first year of the war, Roberto D'Aubuisson amassed a wide following in El Salvador and the global Cold War conflict fueled his pursuit of power. With his knowledge from military and national intelligence experience, D'Aubuisson said he saw "cracks" in El Salvador society that allowed leftist thought to deceive people. "It was my task to stop the communist avalanche" said D'Aubuisson, referring to his election as president of El Salvador's Constituent Assembly in 1982 (Stackl). Like many leaders in the western hemisphere, D'Aubuisson felt that communism, or any facet of leftist thought, would tear down the democratic institutions of the state and take away citizens' freedoms. This notion was clear via his ties to attempted coups against the JRG and PDC, despite the groups' shared commitment to suppressing leftist insurrection (Montgomery 161). D'Aubuisson exploited the division created by the U.S.-Soviet conflict and poised himself on the side he felt represented moral justice. He attacked any groups associated with leftist thought in his speeches and claimed they would lead El Salvador into ruins (Montomgery 158). In a 1989 press release, D'Aubuisson had the following to response to reporters asking why the FMLN disliked him so fervently:

> I am an enemy of communism, Marxism-Leninism, or whatever one chooses to call those who approve totalitarianism that goes against the rights of man. Even if this campaign against me continues, I will not change my thoughts or principles of freedom. I will continue to struggle for the respect of these principles for all my Salvadoran brethren, for whom I have always struggled and for whom I will

> continue to struggle despite all this slander that the people know is unjust. ("D'Aubuisson Explains")

In alienating the left, D'Aubuisson made his position well-known. He posed a strict choice for the Salvadoran people: freedom or oppression.

D'Aubuisson clearly drew a distinct line between anything even tangentially associated with communism. Not unlike much of the global ideological discourse of the time, his message explained that there was no middle ground to be had. Any concession to the left was, for him, sympathy for the communist cause. In a 1980 public appearance 1980, D'Aubuisson reportedly said that James Cheek, a U.S. envoy in charge of the embassy at the time, would "get what he deserves" for "leading El Salvador to Communism" while drawing his finger across his throat (Bonner). And in a 1983 interview with German reporters, he was quoted as saying to the reporters "You Germans had the right idea, killing Jews to stop the spread of Communism" (Bonner). There was a deep-rooted, purely negative sentiment of Communism that motivated D'Aubuisson to do everything in his power to suppress its influence in El Salvador. His rhetoric expressed to the people that Communism must be curbed at *any* cost, and no life mattered if it was devoted to communist ideals. He stated the following on the presence of communism in El Salvador:

> The developments in Berlin, Cinquera, Tananacingo, and many other villages, clearly show that we are facing an implacable and dehumanized enemy, who cares nothing about the Salvadoran people's suffering because its sole objective is to seize power and to destroy our republican institutions. Only the bravery and heroism of our armed forces…has kept these subversive groups directed and

> supported by international communism from taking over our homeland and turning it into a satellite of the Soviet Union. ("D'Aubuisson Comments on Elections, Economics")

Though D'Aubuisson's hatred for leftist ideology was certainly no secret, the fear he created in the Salvadoran people somewhat masked the aggression of his outlook. El Salvador was at grave risk seeing the expansion of communism, a true matter of life and death.

Turning to El Salvador's Left

While attacking communism as an ideology, D'Aubuisson consistently persecuted the members of El Salvador's left: members of the PDC, FMLN, and other leftist revolutionary groups. He was trying to create distrust among El Salvador's citizens in their government. They were at risk of being under full-fledged communist control. He claimed that the FMLN and PDC wanted to establish "a totalitarian ideology" that was "based on the Marxist-Leninist system" ("D'Aubuisson Comments on Elections, Junta"). In 1987, D'Aubuisson pushed to form a commission of doctors to assess the mental health of El Salvador's president, PDC member José Napoleón Duarte. When asked why, D'Aubuisson claimed that "[Duarte] comes up with so many absurdities, such as offending and attacking [him]…the Constitution states that to relieve a president of his duties the Assembly must create a commission, and if they declare he is slightly off his rocker, well…let him throw in the towel!" ("D'Aubuisson, Ochoa Comment on Charges").

Furthermore, he accused leftist groups of working to destroy the basis of the Salvadoran state. In 1984 he claimed that "the subversives are destroying [El Salvador's] economy and infrastructure every day" and that the FMLN was "destroying the entire democratic process that [El Salvador] has achieved" ("D'Aubuisson on Return to Public Life").

D'Aubuisson frequently attacked the Church along with the left. Priests at the time often denounced the actions of the National Guard and right-wing groups. A common enemy of the Salvadoran right, Jesuits and the Catholic clergy were frequently scolded for their "interference" in the nation's politics ("D'Aubuisson Defines"). "Keep the church out of state decisions" D'Aubuisson said. (Aldana). He reiterated this opinion regularly, explaining that "man should choose his own destiny with the good example of his parents and not by teachings of the political clergy" ("D'Aubuisson Defines"). He commented on the negative impact of the clergy having any participation in the political realm, going so far as to criticize Jesuits for promoting the idea of class struggles, as did communists (Aldana). According to D'Aubuisson, Jesuits were "promoters of political movements whose aim [was] to destroy the military forces and replace them with people's militias," as had happened in Nicaragua and Cuba where "lies and deceit prevailed" ("D'Aubuisson Defines"). D'Aubuisson's vendetta against the priests of El Salvador had existed since the late 1970s, when the White Warriors Union, of which he was the founder, frequently wrote graffiti saying, "Be a Patriot, Kill a Priest" (McKinney). To promote the assassination of priests, D'Aubuisson would say that "once the dog is

dead, [they] won't have to worry about rabies" to death squad members (McKinney). A declassified conversation also revealed that D'Aubuisson "bragged" about planning Archbishop Romero's murder and referred to a lottery between death squad members in which the "winners" would be chosen to assassinate Romero (McKinney).

D'Aubuisson denied all accusations that exposed his violent hatred and willingness to order killings in the name of subduing communism. Despite suspect events such as the disappearances or killings of those who spoke out against him, he addressed such claims in his lifetime as simply defamation (Bonner). He tied it all back to the Salvadoran left, which was never to be trusted in their assessments. When both U.S. and Salvadoran officials called him a "psychopath" and "pathological killer", he simply responded with claims that they were "crazy" and "liars" ("D'Aubuisson Once Called"). D'Aubuisson twisted negative sentiments against him and accused his opposition of defamation. He wanted to create an environment in which, even if a crime was proven, he was only the victim of malevolence by El Salvador's left.

Utilizing Democracy

By the time D'Aubuisson attempted his coups in early 1980, the Salvadoran political state had been in turmoil for decades. Parties and coalitions constantly shifted power back and forth. When D'Aubuisson couldn't achieve a coup to overtake the PDC's centrist government, it was clear that the party would need to be combatted directly in

the political realm, where only the weakened PCN represented the right. The broken political environment allowed D'Aubuisson to create his own political party, the Nationalist Republic Alliance (ARENA), during a clandestine meeting with Guatemalan right-wing extremists ("Arena Celebrates").

Comprised of former PCN members and far-right military members, ARENA established a group committed to a conservative regime and ready to combat any leftist influence. Even the party's name was to represent anti-communist sentiment, because "when a person says he is nationalist and republican, he cannot be sympathetic to communism" ("D'AUBUISSON ON PAST"). D'Aubuisson had created a political group with a clear vision for government, shown even in its name. It was to be a group that represented not only a person's political beliefs, but their moral beliefs as well. D'Aubuisson explained that the party would "fight for constitutional government, fight for elections, fight to give the people an opportunity to express themselves and to support the army in maintaining tranquility and security" ("D'AUBUISSON ON PAST"). "Is it true that the people of El Salvador want a Marxist government, or do they want to live in peace, enjoying progress and order; in other words, under the free system of the west?" he asked in an interview ("D'AUBUISSON ON PAST"). For D'Aubuisson, aligning with ARENA was more than simply joining the right: it was being actively *against* the left.

D'Aubuisson consistently focused on the democratic structure of El Salvador's government. He felt the legal processes of the government were the key to seeing the

end of the turmoil. He claimed that the country had to "hold elections in order to establish a legal government, because the current regime [was making] laws at whim…and the leftists [were hiding] in a certain political party to try to seize power" ("D'Aubuisson Comments on Elections, Economics"). Only the will of the Salvadoran people could combat the corruption that existed among the left. D'Aubuisson never acknowledged any semblance of deceit from the right. Despite citizens suffering the most from the parties' ideologic battle, the focus on elections made it seem as though they held all the power to stop what was happening in El Salvador. This shift of power was a key facet of D'Aubuisson's manipulation, and ARENA soon gained a great following in the country. By the end of the decade, ARENA attained the expansive control D'Aubuisson desired while never straying from its central message: communism, and anything associated with it, did not belong in El Salvador's government.

ARENA's creation in late 1981 came at a pivotal time in El Salvador. The country was about to hold its first elections in 2 years within months of the party's creation to select its provisional government and elect Constituent Assembly seats. D'Aubuisson established his presence in El Salvador as a powerful leader in the months that followed. He argued that only he and ARENA could create the kind of reform that was needed. D'Aubuisson told Salvadoran citizens that "[he and his party] were not against change, but against the way it is being carried out," promising that support for his party was also support for the "glorious armed forces [who are] fighting terrorism and international

communism" ("D'Aubuisson Defines"). Through ARENA, D'Aubuisson had created a direct path for himself in the political and societal spheres. He was the face of the newest, largest right-wing party in the nation. He was no longer simply a former army member or an extremist adversary to the government—he was now a part of the government process. D'Aubuisson attained through ARENA a legal, democratic path for the far-right to state leadership, and he could now be a respected political representative.

El Salvador's 1982 elections were at the forefront of both national and international news in the western hemisphere. They would decide which party could name the provisional president and create El Salvador's reformist government, effectively deciding whether the right or the left would hold power as the war between the two ensued. The CIA and Regan administration were already committed to seeing the PDC hold power over the Salvadoran government through propaganda and financial support (LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* 158). But at events, D'Aubuisson always made an impression on the public. His new platform as an ARENA representative for dialogue bred the start of many signature chants and actions, which he continued throughout the war at his gatherings. For instance, after leading the ARENA's campaign song "Tremble, Tremble, Communists" (Gruson), D'Aubuisson would hold up a watermelon, slash it with a machete, and claim that was the PDC: green, or democratic, on the outside, but red, or communist, on the inside (Bonner). D'Aubuisson ensured he propagated his anti-left

message in distinct ways, and it worked well for the party upon election day. The results gave the majority to the PDC with 40.1%, but this prompted the Salvadoran right (comprised of the PCN and ARENA) to create a coalition to gain the majority with a combined vote of 48.7% (29.53% for ARENA and 19.17% for PCN) (Montgomery 161). But with U.S. support behind the PDC, and the national military relying on U.S. aid, the right was unable to gain control of El Salvador's presidency. However, the parties did attain the majority of Constituent Assembly seats and subsequently named D'Aubuisson as its president. From this position, he had a firm to launch an eventual campaign for El Salvador's presidency.

While part of the Constituent Assembly, D'Aubuisson worked helped to draft a new Salvadoran constitution, which is still in use in the country to this day, and he and ARENA continued to gain support among the public. When the Assembly put in a motion to curtail his power, D'Aubuisson resigned and claimed that he and other right-wing members would "reorganize the leadership, when the assembly becomes a legislative assembly" (Beltran). He was demonstrating that the government's legal processes were not being followed. The statement made through his resignation was to perpetuate further doubts in the public of whether the left could truly be trusted to run it. Then, despite his claim that he would not run for president in the 1984 presidential elections, ARENA announced that he would be their candidate.

Upon his candidacy, D'Aubuisson called on the Salvadoran people to unite against communism. "Salvadorans," he stated, "let us always remember that the interest of the entire Salvadoran people must come before individual or group interests…at these decisive moments, we cannot betray our homeland—we must unite in order to save it" ("D'Aubuisson Comments on Elections, Economics"). Once again shifting the power to the people, D'Aubuisson called on the citizens who surely wanted peace to come together to enact the change they desired. If they wanted prosperity, he and ARENA had to be in office. He was trying to show that the people would only be fairly represented through him. The following quote from his 1984 election speech further expands on this belief and demonstrates the leverage of control that he gave to Salvadorans:

> The fundamental platform of our party is to attain peace, but we want to be very clear about this because we are not trying to deceive anyone. We believe that we will attain peace when El Salvador and our people obtain a victory. It is not true that we will continue negotiations to share with those gentlemen a power to which they have no right. Power emanates only from the vote, from you, from the people. If you wish to join and if you like our platform, welcome to our party and vote for the nationalists! As we always like to state in concluding our messages, I say: Above all the things about which we have spoken to you so much, we say and we will continue saying that El Salvador comes first, second, and third. ("D'Aubuisson Hits Corruption")

D'Aubuisson chose his words carefully, and while rhetoric such as this is not uncharacteristic of a candidate running for office, it is ironic because he spent much of his time denouncing the left and its supporters yet called for unity among the whole country. D'Aubuisson could not fathom compromising with or uniting with the left in

any matter, yet he expected the people of El Salvador to do so to put him into office. His speeches were calculated and expressed a sentiment of care for all of El Salvador, saying the *people* as a whole should be represented. In reality, he was only speaking to people would join in suppressing the voices of those who did not agree. Many followed his promise of peace and voted for his presidency, maybe not realizing that his "peace" that could only be realized in a society of uniform, right-wing beliefs, which was not only impossible, but simply not peace at all.

D'Aubuisson did not win the presidential election and accusations of cheating came from both sides. After Senator Jesse Helms' admission that the CIA delivered money to directly to the Christian Democrats, D'Aubuisson claimed that the election was indeed fraudulent ("A Little Help from Friends"). He believed he "won the elections; but the CIA came, interfered, and made Duarte president" and that his "political rights had certainly been violated" (Stackl). However, the Elections Commission deemed the election legal, and Duarte was officially pronounced as El Salvador's president. However, claims of ARENA having committed fraud were found to be true as representatives of the party were proven to have told uneducated *campesinos* to vote for D'Aubuisson right before entering polls and also handed multiple ballots to every ARENA supporter in various locations (Montgomery 181). D'Aubuisson gaining 46% of the vote to Duarte's 53%, and while the percentage of fraudulent votes on either side could not be

calculated, the vote for ARENA was certainly telling of the widespread support that D'Aubuisson had gained in the country.

Despite his loss, D'Aubuisson was still successful in expanding ARENA's following. ARENA candidate Alfredo Cristiani would win the presidency in 1989, and ARENA would hold power for two decades after. Through ARENA, D'Aubuisson built a network of followers who could help carry out his mission to subdue the power of the left in El Salvador. As D'Aubuisson stated in a 1989 interview, ARENA's purpose was essential when "a monster was born in Nicaragua (the Sandinista government), and the birth of a similar monster was expected in El Salvador…the ARENA party prevented this by winning elections in 1982" (Stackl). ARENA aimed to be a saving grace in El Salvador. It was the mechanism through which the Salvadoran people could supposedly be represented and avoid the destructive consequences of having a leftist government. In reality, however, ARENA was simply a greater platform for D'Aubuisson's own idea of government and his *personal* mechanism to create a coalition of people who could carry out his political goals. Through ARENA, D'Aubuisson ensured that his views were represented even when he was no longer part of the government himself. It was an idea primarily attainable due to the unstable political environment that El Salvador had suffered through for decades. D'Aubuisson's steadfast beliefs and ability to bring the right together allowed for the rise of one of the most prevalent and long-lasting parties in the country's history.

Charisma, Fear, and Extremism

A biographical pamphlet by journalist Malena Recinos, she described D'Aubuisson as "an extraordinary citizen" whose charisma "infected men and women, and everywhere he went, crowds poured out and cheered him on like a movie star" (Sprenkels). He was described as a lean and handsome man, shorter than most at five-foot-six, who wore skin-tight T-shirts at campaign rallies and signed autographs for "adoring female followers" ("Personality Spotlight"). Even President Reagan's ambassador to El Salvador, Deane R. Hinton, once joked that he "ran a risk" when he introduced his then-30-year-old girlfriend to D'Aubuisson, at her request (Bonner). Upon his death in 1992, thousands of mourners filled the streets of El Salvador to commemorate his life, wearing shirts that read "I Love D'Aubuisson" and chanting one of his signature campaign slogans, "Fatherland yes, communism no" (Aleman).

The leader mesmerized his followers with his "caricature of kinetic energy" and impassioned rhetoric (Bonner). It wasn't hard for many to truly believe what he was saying, and that he wanted nothing more than peace for El Salvador. An associate of D'Aubuisson's, David Ernesto Panamá, who assisted in death squad operations (*Political Situation*), described how "the personality of D'Aubuisson gained the affection and esteem of the people" (Sprenkels 22). Panamá emphasized D'Aubuisson's "jovial character" and "ability to work without bounds or fatigue" (Sprenkels 22). "He was a man

that loved freedom" Panamá said, "always willing to sacrifice his life for his people" (Sprenkels 22). However, for those who didn't agree with his message, it was well-known that disagreement should be kept secret. "Everyone is scared of D'Aubuisson" an anonymous observer in a New York Times article said. "You should be asking not what he does during the day but what he does at night" (Chavez). Many of the Salvadorans who spoke negatively about D'Aubuisson during this time insisted on remaining anonymous. This was largely due to the fact that those who D'Aubuisson would call out typically ended up murdered. In televised shows paid for by wealthy Salvadoran exiles, he used intelligence files taken from ANSESAL to denounce alleged traitors and Communists, many of whom were killed by death squads. One of whom was Archbishop Romero, whom D'Aubuisson had targeted only weeks before his assassination after Romero publicly denounced D'Aubuisson as a "liar, torturer, and murderer" General Medrano, D'Aubuisson's mentor, simply stated that "D'Aubuisson was pointing out the Communists so the troops could kill them" (Nairn).

For those who knew D'Aubuisson personally, his purely extremist nature was evident. Manuel Noriega, the de facto right-wing dictator of Panama from 1983 to 1989, had met D'Aubuisson on various occasions. In his autobiography, Noriega described D'Aubuisson as "so radically anti-communist, so extreme on his hatred of anyone even suspected of being on the left and so open about it that he was expelled from [the Salvadoran army] for the sake of appearance" (Noriega). D'Aubuisson was a man of

hardline views, with no room for understanding any facet of the other side. When D'Aubuisson responded "*está jodido, pues*—that's f*cked up" to Noriega's statement that everybody, even communists, were "free to come and go in Panama" (Noriega), Noriega went on to describe D'Aubuisson's nature in the following way:

> The subject illuminated the personality of the man; his prosecution of war was like a psychosis. And his attitude also foreshadowed what he was really doing…while D'Aubuisson never said so directly, he talked about "hitting the Marxists from all directions," saying, "The communists are like vermin…they must be exterminated," and if necessary, he would do so in a "scorched earth" campaign. These were the very words he used. And when he spoke, his eyes glistened with the ardor of what he was saying. (Noriega 73)

In a *New York Times* article, associates of D'Aubuisson described his staunch, aggressive presence. They described his handsome features as appearing so tense that one observer described him as "having clenched hair" who preferred one-on-one communication with officials. According to the article, the observer explained that D'Aubuisson "will sit around a big table listening and then call someone over to the side to meet with him later, then he really talks…he has the uncanny ability to manipulate other people, or to make you uneasy while you are asking questions" (66). Colonel Roberto Eulalio Santiváñez, D'Aubuisson's superior at ANSESAL, remembered D'Aubuisson as "an anarchic psychopath" (Kinzer, "EX-AIDE").

Although D'Aubuisson was not the first, and certainly not the last, leader to express such sinister views, even prominent dictators in the time noted how aggressive and extreme his views were. His rhetoric only made it that much more likely that he was

guilty of all the crimes he was accused of at the time; however, it also granted him the opportunity to take advantage of a society that was searching for a way out of social and political destruction. His fervent beliefs gave a clear enemy to a country searching for peace and made many too afraid to speak out against him.

A Deadly Combination

D'Aubuisson had a powerful influence in El Salvador. He utilized various avenues to spread his beliefs and alienate the opposition, largely taking advantage of the democratic processes in the country. While many were fearful of him, many were true supporters. He frequently used positive rhetoric to frame his aggressive ideals—being part of ARENA was "patriotic," and he was not an extremist but simply a nationalist. He characterized himself as a man for the people who only wanted to save El Salvador from chaos and destruction. However, he was a man for only a select group: those in favor of the right-wing, and anyone else had to be suppressed. Many who may have wanted to speak out against him worried for their lives and the lives of their families. But his charisma, physical attributes, and impassioned dialogue convinced a large portion Salvadorans that he truly was the leader the country needed. His mass manipulation, with the help of other circumstances and associations during this time, made Roberto D'Aubuisson one of the most powerful leaders El Salvador had ever seen.

2. Alliance with the Wealthy Elite in El Salvador

Roberto D'Aubuisson was no stranger to the Salvadoran social and political hierarchies. Despite having grown up in the middle class, he grew to join El Salvador's elite that was comprised of top military officials and wealthy oligarchs. The oligarchy had long been aligned with El Salvador's military to form the country's right wing, and the coalition enjoyed decades of government control. However, upon the coup in 1979 that gave way to a center-left junta, it was clear the historical power the oligarchy had enjoyed could no longer be enforced by the military. The junta enacted agrarian reform policies that severely cut the ownership of landowners by expropriating landholdings that were over 500 hectares, with compensation. Phase I of the three phase process allowed owners to "reserve" or keep 100 to 150 hectares depending upon the quality of land (Haggerty). Massive agrarian reform was seen as necessary as more than 70% of the nation's land was owned by less than 1% of the population (Gruson). The government was to redistribute the land and turn it into cooperatives run by laborers.

This phase affected 15% of El Salvador's land, and saw some positive results. British report Jon Snow visited one of the cooperatives, noting the following:

> La Llavora, a farm of 300 acres it produces coffee, rice and sugar. But although the owner, a 75-year-old millionaire still lives in the heart of the farm, it now belongs to its workers. The junta recognized that if poverty was to be undermined here, the land upon which they worked would have to be redistributed to spread the wealth more evenly. (Snow)

While Snow reported positive outcomes from the new system, particularly in terms of education and income for the hundreds of families that lived there, this was only a select example of the reform process working efficiently. Most of the cooperatives ended up operating the same way they had prior to the reforms, without any of the benefits that La Llavora saw. Additionally, only about a fourth of the rural poor received claims to the land, much of which was "no good" or was too little of a portion to feed even one family (Snow). A 1986 study found that 95% of the cooperatives were unable to pay even interest on the debt that they were forced to take on in order to pay back the landowners; in total, cooperatives owed over $800 million (Snow).

Despite the little benefit of the agrarian reform on the rural left, the junta continued to take steps to appease the left. It nationalized the country's banking system and took control of the agricultural export market to ensure beneficiaries had credit. Rural areas that were supposed to benefit from the reform saw increased levels of violence from guerillas, forcing many landowners to flee if they would not give up their holdings (Kinzer, "The Hunger"). This created resentment amongst the oligarchs of El

Salvador, and a need to find a way back into control over the government and their wealth. D'Aubuisson provided the perfect opportunity for this: conservative ARENA was already making headway in the political realm shortly after its creation in 1981, and his role as the death squad leader gave oligarchs a way to indirectly subdue the forces that had forced them from their holdings. The CIA had already reported that "millions of dollars" were sent to D'Aubuisson in 1981 to support a right-wing coup, and that his following was comprised largely of the Salvadoran elite (*El Salvador: The Role of Roberto D'Aubuisson*). As his political prominence grew, so did his wealthy following.

D'Aubuisson's alliance with the elite was not unknown to civilians. One poor Salvadoran who had voted for Duarte in the 1984 elections agreed that ARENA was the party of the rich but figured candidates would not have to steal because of it. "Maybe they'll steal a little," she told a reporter, "but won't fill their pockets without extending a hand to the poor" (Miller). With severe economic downturn due to the significant decreases in agricultural exports she felt she had no choice but to go against the candidate, Duarte, and the U.S.-backed government who had fallen through with their promises. Amid a disastrous economy fueled by the left, D'Aubuisson and ARENA were even able to utilize elitist ties to gain support amongst the lower classes.

Death Squad and ARENA Funding

In 1981, approximately 150-300 oligarch families resided in Miami (Hornblower). Many of these Salvadorans supported conservative U.S. politics, traveling to the country for Ronald Reagan's inauguration and supporting his ascension into U.S. executive power. One oligarch explained that he "believes in free enterprise, just like Reagan talked about in his campaign," expressing his "great hopes that Reagan will correct the huge errors" of the Carter administration and not let El Salvador "fall into the hands of international communism" (Hornblower). Another oligarch expressed the same sentiments, and though denying any association or funding for D'Aubuisson, was a co-founder of the anticommunist Broad National Front and accompanied D'Aubuisson to Washington in 1980, shortly before his visa was revoked (Hornblower).

In a 1984 congressional testimony, former ambassador Robert White claimed that six wealthy Salvadoran landowners financed D'Aubuisson and his death squad operations, based on a trusted source close to the six (Farah). These wealthy oligarchs became known as the "Miami Six" who were providing funding for D'Aubuisson's death squads, and coordinating attacks, kidnappings, and assassinations through their Salvadoran connections in Miami (Brinkley). While only White's testimony served as evidence of the existence of a specific six oligarchs, the 1993 United Nations Truth Commissions Report on El Salvador confirmed that the wealthy elites were in fact aiding the death squads. The report assessed the following:

> Former Major D'Aubuisson drew considerable support from wealthy civilians who feared that their interests would be affected by the reform programme announced

> by the Government Junta. They were convinced that the country faced a serious threat of Marxist insurrection which they had to overcome. The Commission on the Truth obtained testimony from many sources that some of the richest landowners and businessmen outside and inside the country offered their estates, homes, vehicles, and bodyguards to help the death squads. They also provided funds used to organize and maintain the death squads, especially those directed by former Major D'Aubuisson. (13)

The report also linked Hector Regalado, an oligarch closely associated with D'Aubuisson who even served as his Chief of Security during D'Aubuisson's tenure as Assembly President, as coordinating D'Aubuisson's network of death squads; at times, even from his office in the National Assembly (13). According to a CIA report on right-wing terrorism in El Salvador, Regalado had been associated with D'Aubuisson since the 1970's, directing ARENA's death squads who engage in "assassination, kidnapping, torture, and political intimidation" (*Briefing Paper*).

Another oligarch associated with D'Aubuisson was Francisco Guirola Beeche, a conservative businessman who travelled frequently to the U.S. and was known as a financial backer of d'Aubiusson. In 1985, Guirola was arrested along with 2 other men at a Texas airfield as their private jet was being refueled. In the jet were nine suitcases containing more than $5.9 million, and PDC members claimed this money was to be used by ARENA to "corrupt the electoral process" (Omang). The Guirola family had been historically against Duarte after the PDC-backed junta nationalized the bank, the Banco Salvadoreno, which the family owned. Guirola had even let D'Aubuisson use his office in San Salvador as an ARENA headquarters (Omang). The pilot, Gus Maestrales, lived in

Florida and was also "known as a possible contraband exporter" (Omang). Guirola also had allegations related to cocaine smuggling, money laundering, and associations with the Argentine secret police, yet after his arrest the U.S. government "dropped most of the charges against him…supposedly to avoid jeopardizing his future changes of emigrating to the U.S." (Scott 48).

The wealthy elite also heavily funded D'Aubuisson's political party, ARENA. During elections, the heads of sugar, coffee, and other agricultural associations hosted fundraising events in support for D'Aubuisson's campaigns (McCartney). Among over 750 of El Salvador's wealthiest, D'Aubuisson said he felt "practically amid family," pledging to put these "men of the countryside" in charge of the government ministries and agencies that run the economy (McCartney). The president of the coffee association expressed that "deputies of ARENA, D'Aubuisson's party, are our deputies" (McCartney). The association allowed ARENA to raise significantly more campaign money than opponents, totaling over $1 million (Montgomery 134).

Pushing conservative economic policy, such as re-privatizing the national bank and reversing some agrarian reform, D'Aubuisson made great allies with El Salvador's wealthiest. This was key in expanding his influence, not only through ARENA but through death squad operations as well. The downturn in the economy made his associations appealing to even some of the lower class, who wanted to see economic

growth that D'Aubuisson promised to provide. The disparity between classes ultimately worked in the Major's favor and was essential to his rise to leadership.

3. U.S. Complacency Towards the Salvadoran Right

Roberto D'Aubuisson's exercise of power was not unknown among much of El Salvador, nor the United States. An essential facet of D'Aubuisson's prominence was the fact that the U.S., despite having knowledge of his wrongdoings, did not make much effort to stop him. They continued to fund El Salvador's military, who had connections with D'Aubuisson's death squads, and, while never expressing outright support, never directly denounced him either. U.S. foreign policy and aid to El Salvador remained

focused on stopping leftist guerillas, even if it meant allowing D'Aubuisson to continue his own clandestine operations.

The Beginning: Carter and El Salvador

By the start of El Salvador's conflict in late 1979, President Carter had already claimed his commitment to human rights and deemed their fulfillment a central factor in determining the amount of aid granted to a country. Given the abuses that had been occurring in El Salvador under its autocratic regimes, Carter decided to stop all military aid and cut economic aid by half in 1977 (LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* 38). However, upon the usurpation of President Romero in 1979 and the creation of a junta pursuing reconciliation between conservatives and the far left, the Carter administration subsequently reinstated military aid to El Salvador. It pressured the Christian Democrats to join in governance and form a new junta, which would be achieved in January 1980, that would not allow the far left to have any sort of political voice (Bonner). Carter's appointment for El Salvador's new ambassador in early 1980, Robert White, explained the strategy well by saying that "what Latin America desperately needed [was] a non-Communist model for revolution" (LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* 140). With the upcoming U.S. presidential election and Reagan's call for a stricter presence in Central America, Carter prioritized repression of the left over ensuring the realization of human rights in the country.

The new junta with the official presence of the PDC still pursued agrarian and banking reform, but it ultimately catered to the U.S.'s desire to curb leftist influence. The mutability of the junta's policies laid the groundwork for D'Aubuisson's rise to political prominence, as both sides of El Salvador felt unheard. The right was alienated in reform and leftist revolutionaries were still suppressed, and this caused the government's influence to wane. In a U.S. Department of State cable in September 1980 from El Salvador's embassy, the PDC was described as "a party in search of a constituency" (*Political Situation*). Prominent Christian Democrat José Duarte even conceded that the PDC "had been practically eliminated as a grassroots organization" and the junta was virtually without popular support (Duarte 179. However, though the administration wanted to curb a leftist uprising, it also actively worked to prevent a rightist coup as well. Neither extreme of El Salvador could be given power, so the objectives of Robert White and the U.S. embassy focused on four things: 1) pushing the junta to implement social reforms, thereby building legitimacy for itself and undercutting the left's popular support; 2) reducing violence by the security forces by urging the government to take military control away from the right; 3) protect the junta from a right-wing coup; and 4) isolate the radical left by encouraging the moderate left to abandon alliances with guerillas (LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* 43).

Taking control of the armed forces away from the right would prove to be the hardest and most important goal. One U.S. official stated that "what [the U.S.] has to do

is wean the military off the teat of the oligarchy and onto [theirs]" (Dickey, "Oligarch Takes Stand") which was difficult given the long-standing history of military and oligarchy alignment. Shortly before Ambassador's White's appointment, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State James Cheek was sent to fill in the role at El Salvador's embassy. Upon learning of an imminent right-wing coup in February, Cheek threatened to cut off aid if the military participated in the coup, but also promised to grant new aid if they stayed loyal to the junta ("Rightist Coup Imminent"). When the coup failed, Cheek ensured the U.S. kept its promise. After returning to Washington, he urged the administration to deploy military advisory teams and send the Salvadoran army six helicopters to maintain U.S. credibility. Cheek argued that this would ensure a "clean counter-insurgency war" (Riding). Despite Ambassador White's ardent opposition, the U.S. followed through on Cheek's promise. In October 1980, army logistics teams were sent to survey the military's weapon needs, despite the administration's declaration that only non-lethal aid would be given. Military training teams were sent along with a five-man team instructed to help Salvadorans organize counterinsurgency operations to defend against possible guerilla attacks on the upcoming coffee harvest (LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* 45). The six helicopters were also approved at no-cost to El Salvador, so long as the military instilled human rights reforms and eliminated influence of the extreme right via the transfer of officers implicated in death squads. The military did

neither—they simply created a new code for military conduct and the helicopters were approved ("JRG Provides Written Response").

U.S. foreign policy towards El Salvador under Carter could not stop the decade-long conflict that would unfold in El Salvador. The military proved unwilling to meet the demands of the junta, prompting frustration among governing members and their eventual resignation. El Salvador's political sphere grew even more polarized. "We have not been able to stop the repression" said junta member Héctor Dada, "and those committing acts of repression…go unpunished" (Arnson 19). Former members of the PDC split to form a separate Christian Democratic party, weakening the PDC's power, and the centrism of the junta began to tilt to the right. Progressive military officers were stripped of their command, and their leader, Colonel Majano, was removed from the junta in November 1980 after a failed assassination attempt (LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* 47). During this time the left unified as well. The 5 major guerillas groups combined to form la Frente Farbundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), named for the Communist leader who led the peasant uprising that led to *La Mantanza* in 1932. They joined the leftist political group Frente Democrático Revolucionario (FDR) to create a coalition uniting the left in the exact way the U.S. had been working to prevent.

Roberto D'Aubuisson took great advantage of the decline in popular support for the PDC and the junta's subsequent failure, utilizing the instability of the government in 1980 and 1981 to build a network that could "save El Salvador from Communism" (9 p.

50). A former aide of his described how D'Aubuisson and his supporters set out to build a structured organization with 3 tiers: "a political or propaganda level…to encourage and protect the military level;…a financial system where we would always have the money to attack; and a military level—what the United States called right-wing death squads—people who go out and kidnap and kill communists" (Pyes). With the wealthy oligarchs both in El Salvador and in exile helping to fund D'Aubuisson, and support among the military, the extreme right began to take formative shape. In 1980, over 8 thousand people were killed, the majority either by the security forces or death squads, and no arrests were made. Despite the supposed alliance between the PDC and the military, many of the victims were PDC leaders (Duarte 108). The moderate factions of El Salvador were systematically being removed from prominence. The junta's failure to gain substantial support resulted in an extremist tug of war between El Salvador's left and right as both gained a greater following. When Reagan took office in 1981, he would make clear the U.S.'s position on the matter in the years that followed.

Enter Reagan: "Rollback" and El Salvador's Right

Since the Truman Administration, U.S. presidents made had the clear mission of stopping the expansion of communism via "Containment," in which they focused solely on stopping communist influence from going any further than it already had, or "containing" it to the regions in which it was already pervasive. It was clear, however,

that although U.S. foreign policy goals centered around keeping communism at bay, citizens in numerous countries continued to band together to support leftist revolutions. This indicated somewhat of a failure in the eyes of the global stage—by the 1970s, countries throughout Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia had clear ideologic battles brewing.

The continuous rise in global conflict prompted Reagan to create a new vision for Cold War efforts during the 1980 campaign: communist, and therefore Soviet, influence must not only be stopped in its tracks, but it must be reversed in the areas where it had already taken hold. This was a policy he enacted called "rollback," in which the goal was not to stop leftist revolutions from starting other countries, but to push against the ones that had already taken shape as a way to display to the rest of the world that these movements would not be tolerated. Though certainly not everyone would agree with Reagan, the notion that "radical left" ideals could be pushed back was enticing as the presidential campaign fell during a peak time of severe Latin American conflict. Reagan made "rollback" the crux of his foreign policy promises as he criticized Carter's handling of the proxy wars, stating in his campaign that "in four years, Mr. Carter's administration has managed to alienate our friends in the Hemisphere, to encourage the destabilization of governments, and to permit Cuban and Soviet influence to grow" (78).

In order to achieve the goal of "rollback," Reagan focused his foreign policy efforts on providing overt support for anti-Communist insurgents and any groups

actively fighting against the spread of communism in their home countries. This was known as the Reagan Doctrine, the term used to characterize this aspect of the administration's foreign policy. "We must stand by all our democratic allies," Reagan said in his 1985 State of the Union address, "and we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives to defy Soviet-supported aggression…support for freedom fighters is self-defense" ("The 'Reagan Doctrine' is Announced"). In the context of El Salvador, Reagan's policy manifested through support for the right-wing and any moderate groups not aligned with leftist guerillas.

When Reagan took office in January 1981, the U.S. was well aware of the atrocities occurring in El Salvador, even those against U.S. citizens. In fact, four U.S. nuns were gruesomely murdered just a month before his inauguration. The churchwomen had just arrived in El Salvador and were driving back from the airport when they were kidnapped, raped, then shot to death. Their bodies were left stabbed in a shallow grave for peasants to find the next day. In response, Carter suspended military aid to the country. The U.S. Embassy then presented evidence incriminating five guardsmen to the Salvadoran government in April 1981, but no charges were made until February of 1982, when one guardsman gave a full confession ("Rural Population"). Later that month, President Reagan invoked his presidential emergency powers to reinstate $55 million in military aid to El Salvador's government (LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* 54). A live

report from British reporter Jon Snow in 1981 highlights Reagan's focus on aiding the military:

> President Reagan has charged that [the guerillas] are being supplied with weapons by Russia and Cuba, and his administration explains that they have American weaponry by saying that it comes from old American stockpiles in Vietnam and Ethiopia. In reality, these weapons have been bought with money raised from kidnap ransoms, and most predate anything left in Vietnam. The Soviets certainly favor the left here, but how much tangible support they give is questionable. And behind America's accusation of Russian involvement in armed supplies is a major embarrassment in their own supply policy. US military supplies to the junta's army against whom these people are fighting were suspended after the brutal murder last December of 4 American nuns. The Salvadoran judge appointed to look into the case was killed himself on the day his report was due to come out. That report heavily implicated the military in those deaths. A brand-new Hughes helicopter, which we filmed secretly in the square of an army-held town called Guitarra, underlines Mr. Reagan's decision to ignore the deaths of the nuns and resume supplies. More weapons are arriving daily for the very army units that were manning the roadblocks at which the sisters disappeared. Although the judges report was never published, reliable sources are adamant that he had evidence that Salvadoran army men raped and shot the nuns in cold blood. (Snow)

The month he reinstated the aid, President Reagan had submitted his first certification report on the Salvadoran government's progress on human rights, a Congressional requirement needed to allow U.S. military assistance (*Presidential Certification*). In the certification, the administration claimed the situation had improved based on statistics showing a decrease in killings between 1980 and 1981 (from 9,000 to 5,331) (*Presidential Certification*). The report also made no reference to any government complicity in rights violations, directly denying the association between paramilitary death squads and government security forces. This claim was made after a U.S. embassy report was released claiming death squads were comprised of "both on and off-duty

security forces" who were responsible for "many hundreds, perhaps thousands," of El Salvador's political killings (*Presidential Certification*). The statistics used in the certification were also assembled by the embassy via Salvadoran press reports. An embassy official acknowledged, however, that the Salvadoran press was "inherently biased, not accurate, and not competent by U.S. standards" (*El Salvador's Decade of Terror*). Other groups found the reports claims suspicious as well. According to three human rights groups (the Catholic Church's Legal Aid Office, the Central American University's Documentation Center, and the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission), the actual number of killings in 1981 was 2 to 3 times higher than the embassy's reporting. While each group had slightly different calculations, the lowest of all 3 was 13,000, compared to the president's claim of a little over 5000. El Salvador's own Defense Minister, Gen. Jose Guillermo Garcia, reported that a total of 30,000 people had been killed since the October 1979 coup (Dinges).

There were many claims by former U.S. officials that the Reagan administration largely ignored evidence presented against El Salvador's government and the existence of death squads. Former Ambassador Robert White claimed that information regarding wealthy exiles funding the right from Miami, Archbishop Romero's assassination, and details on death squads were reported to Washington but "the administration [had] suppressed these facts" (Brinkley). White claimed that he had testimony confirming D'Aubuisson as the organizer the assassination, a fact that would later prove to be true.

Less than a month after White's testimony, Secretary of State George P. Shultz had lunch with D'Aubuisson during a visit to El Salvador, emphasizing that, no matter the outcome of the upcoming 1984 presidential election, the U.S. believed in "accepting the verdict, whatever it may be" (Brinkley). Another senior State Department official Elliot Abrams also presented testimony saying that it was "highly likely that Roberto D'Aubuisson was an active participant in and very possibly at the head of the meeting during which Archbishop Romero's assassination was planned" (Bonner). His assessment was based on a source who had "demonstrated reliability"; yet, these cables were marked secret and no public condemnation of D'Aubuisson occurred, and he continued to operate freely in El Salvador (Bonner).

As evidence of El Salvador's military committing human rights abuses mounted for the administration, aid and CIA training did not cease. Even the origins of El Salvador's death squad forces came from U.S. involvement. In an interview with journalist Allan Nairn, General Medrano, former Salvadoran intelligence leader, had this to say:

> ORDEN and ANSESAL grew out of the State Department, the CIA, and the Green Berets during the time of Kennedy. We created these specialized agencies to fight the plans and actions of international communism. We organized ORDEN, ANSESAL, and counterinsurgency courses, and we bought special arms—G3 automatic rifles—to detain communist movement. We are preparing them to stop communism. (Nairn)

CIA training of the military continued through covert and overt operations. A former member of El Salvador's security forces gave testimony regarding the training

Salvadoran officers received from the U.S., which included training in "methods of physical and psychological torture" (31). An excerpt of his testimony highlights the methods that officers in El Salvador's security forces used against prisoners:

> First, you try to torture him psychologically. If he's a Marxist or revolutionary, it's not easy to make him talk, so you have to psychologically harm the prisoner. If the person is important—say, a journalist or teacher or a laborer or student leader, or a person who has something to offer—he isn't treated cruelly at first…You try to trap him psychologically. You try to come across as a sensitive, decent person—not as a killer…But after using these methods for a few days or a week or two, you start getting tough…After these sessions, the physical torture begins. First, you put the prisoner in a small, completely dark room, and you don't let him sleep. You place him, naked and handcuffed, on a bed frame. The room stinks horribly because of the urine and excrement of former prisoners, and you keep him there for a week without sleep so that his nerves will be shot when you start to torture him. When the actual torture begins, there are a lot of different methods: cutting off pieces of the skin, burning him with cigarettes. They teach you how to hit a person in the stomach, but in a sophisticated way so the person suffers a lot of pain but you don't see signs on the outside. Or sometimes you just beat him…beat him, and beat him, and beat him. After that, if he still doesn't talk, you take him to a toilet filled with excrement. You put on gloves and shove his head into the toilet for thirty seconds or so. You do this over and over. Then you wash him and take him to the electric shock room. There's a special torture room in the Treasury Police…it's soundproof so they don't hear anything outside.
>
> In general, you will kill the prisoners because there's an assumption they shouldn't live. If we pass them to the judge, they'll go free and we'll maybe have to pick them up again. If there's a lot of pressure—like from Amnesty International—then we might pass them to a judge, but if there's no pressure, then they're dead. When it's over, you just throw him in the alleys with a sign saying Mano Blanco or ESA (Secret Anticommunist Army)…These are the things that happen in war. (Nairn)

One of the most prominent connections between the U.S. and the Salvadoran military was the massacre of a Salvadoran village, El Mozote, in December of 1981. Anywhere

from 900-1200 civilians, a majority of which were children, were lined up and shot by the Salvadoran army's Atlacatl Battalion. The Battalion was created at the U.S. School of the Americas in Panama and trained at Fort Bragg in North Carolina (Goldston). Amid a Congressional debate regarding aid, reports of the massacre were denied by U.S. officials, even with the published testimony of an eyewitness who escaped the attack (Danner). It wasn't until the remnants of the mass grave were dug up a decade later that U.S. media acknowledge the terrorism (125). Military aid and training continued amid reports of abuses like these.

D'Aubuisson: No Stranger to the U.S.

Within the first year of his presidency, President Reagan made clear the commitment to his doctrine. The focus was and would continue to be the rollback of communist influence in El Salvador. This placed D'Aubuisson on the right side in terms of U.S. aggression—he, too, vehemently opposed the spread of communism, and actively worked to suppress it. As he brought the far-right together, he was certainly not overlooked by the U.S. government. In fact, he had already visited it. In April 1980, he traveled to the U.S. to visit congressional offices in Washington. In the tapes that would be distributed to Salvadoran military officials in attempts to gain support for a right-wing coup, he claimed that he and his followers had "spoken with various senators in the capital and they asked [them] that [they] maintain until November…the Reagan

Republicans will win, and our luck will change" (Morley). Only months after his first visit, he returned, illegally as his visa had been revoked due to threats he made against U.S. diplomats in El Salvador, to hold a press conference on Capitol Hill sponsored by the American Legion and the American Security Council, a right-wing lobbying group (Morley). He also received sympathetic hearings from two U.S. officials who would be part of Reagan's foreign-policy transition team and National Security Council staff (Morley).

D'Aubuisson was already on the U.S. government's radar, but Reagan's administration received direct assessments of D'Aubuisson as well. The CIA's National Foreign Assessment Center, at the request of NSA Advisor Richard Allen, produced a memorandum specifically regarding D'Aubuisson's role in the war in March of 1981. The brief report characterized him as an "articulate and charismatic spokesman for the far right of El Salvador" who was "the principal henchman for wealthy landowners and the coordinator of right-wing death squads that [had] murdered several thousand suspected leftists and leftist sympathizers in 1980" (Morley). His associations were clear, as were his intentions. The excerpt below characterizes the intimate knowledge the Reagan administration already had on D'Aubuisson within the first 2 months of his presidency:

> While relatively intelligent, D'Aubuisson is egocentric, reckless, and perhaps mentally unstable. The philosophy he publicly espouses calls for the physical elimination of El Salvador's leftist opposition, which he defines as anyone not supportive of the traditional status quo. His hatred of those he suspects

> of harboring leftist sympathies motivated his visits to the US last spring. After his US visa was cancelled, D'Aubuisson traveled throughout Latin America seeking military and political support for his Broad National Front—an ultra-conservative group of wealthy Salvadorans…D'Aubuisson could play a spoiler role by continuing to encourage right-wing terrorists—many of whom are enlisted personnel in the security forces—and by issuing inflammatory public declarations against the junta and those sympathetic to the reform process. D'Aubuisson's penchant for action is underscored by his sponsorship of two unsuccessful coups during the past year. His efforts to turn back the clock on reform and initiate an all-out civil war against the left could succeed if he manages to convince a majority of the officer corps—most of whom have rightist sympathies—that the new US administration would accept an ouster of the Christian Democrats from the government. (*El Salvador: the Role of Roberto d'Aubuisson*)

This was not the only official assessment made of D'Aubuisson, however. A 1984 CIA report detailing right-wing terrorism in El Salvador specifically noted D'Aubuisson and ARENA as having "consolidated power" in such a way that allowed them to act "with relative impunity" against those they perceived to be enemies (*Briefing Paper*). It also directly implicates D'Aubuisson as the leader of the paramilitary death squads that are part of ARENA, noting that one of its offsets, the Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA), attacked D'Aubuisson in a communique to cover his association. The report lists at least seven actions directly related to ARENA, including the "assassination of PDC mayors and party workers prior to the 1982 elections"; the "setting off of four bombs in San Salvador on September 6 ,1983"; the "torture and killing of supposed guerillas"; and "machine-gunning PDC headquarters on June 7, 1983" (*Briefing Paper*). In addition to D'Aubuisson's role, the report explicitly states the existence of death squads among the National Police and the National Guard.

Despite the knowledge of D'Aubuisson's associations and wrongdoing's in El Salvador, the U.S. government remained committed to its fight against communism in the country, even if that meant allowing a different kind of enemy to operate freely. This is largely because of D'Aubuisson's influence over the right in El Salvador, who still pushed for full right-wing control over the government. The U.S. had given implicit support for Duarte and the PDC during the 1984 elections, as their moderate views were ideal for the U.S. pursuit of upholding democracy in El Salvador, via the refusal to grant D'Aubuisson a visa during the campaign. However, only months after Duarte was declared the winner, D'Aubuisson was granted a visa to visit the U.S. after the uproar caused by El Salvador's election results. The goal for the administration was to persuade D'Aubuisson to support the new election of Duarte in El Salvador, without which, the U.S. believed, would make Duarte "vulnerable to intrigue and plots that could make it impossible for him to carry out democratic reforms and rally the Salvadoran people behind efforts to defeat leftist guerillas" (Goshko). Officials had expressed how continued chaos in this way could also cause Congress and the American public to push for abandoning Reagan's policies and demand the U.S. pull out from Central America. D'Aubuisson's support was crucial for the U.S. government—though he was not their choice for leader of El Salvador, his influence in the country was vital to U.S. foreign policy. However, their invitation of D'Aubuisson to Washington revealed the focus of the administration on uniting El Salvador against the left, as the reinstation of his visa came

only a month after his implication in an assassination plot against U.S. ambassador to El Salvador Thomas R. Pickering (Goshko). U.S. officials who spoke on the matter refused to be identified.

In contrast to former Ambassador Robert White's assessment of D'Aubuisson as a "pathological killer" with a "sick mind," President Reagan's ambassador to El Salvador, Deane R. Hinton, worked to repair the relationship between the U.S. Embassy and the Salvadoran right (Severo). A former aide of Hinton's described the ambassador's "almost father-son" relationship with D'Aubuisson, saying that Hinton "thought he could channel [D'Aubuisson], push him along the democratic path, and theoretically curb his more violent tendencies" (Bonner). The aid, however, felt that Hinton "created a monster in the process" (Bonner). Hinton also vehemently opposed any suggestion that the presidential election results had been inflated or tampered with, rejecting investigation attempts by local universities (Bonner). Additionally, State Department officials frequently claimed to have no knowledge of D'Aubuisson's association with death squads and Romero's assassination, despite CIA reporting and Robert White's testimony claiming otherwise (Krauss).

Friends on Capitol Hill

D'Aubuisson was not only known amongst department officials, but amongst Congressional members as well. As a prominent leader in El Salvador, Senators and

Representatives on both sides of the political aisle were aware of his influence in the country, and this was crucial as Congress made decisions regarding foreign aid and policy towards the country. As the Reagan Administration pushed for increased military aid, factions of Congress split and noted the U.S.'s clear position for supporting the right and El Salvador's government, despite reports of human rights abuses.

In a July 1982 Congressional record, several members of the House of Representatives spoke regarding support for a bill that would extend the Presidential Certification process required for approving foreign aid to El Salvador. The bill was brought forth in response to the little progress made in the cases of 6 slain Americans, including the 4 nuns, as well as a missing journalist. House Representative Gerry Studds brought up the peculiarity regarding the fact that the Salvadoran and U.S. governments had evidence linking El Salvador's security forces to the slaying of the nuns, yet a trial had not even been set for the guardsmen. Representative Richard Ottinger additionally noted how over 12,000 civilians had been killed in the previous 18 months, and the movement of El Salvador into a more dangerous and unstable situation. Ottinger relayed additional concern for the "investiture of power in the hands of one of the most brutal human rights violators in El Salvador, Roberto D'Aubuisson" in the Assembly elections held months prior (*Congressional Record - House*, 97th Congress). D'Aubuisson's role, as well as the Salvadoran government's, in violent conflict in El Salvador was not unknown to members of Congress. However, as one senior

Congressman claimed, the certification process "put the ambassadors and the assistant secretaries in an impossible situation" since the Administration "would certify, no matter what" to continue its goal of combatting leftist aggression (*Secretary of State's Panel on El Salvador*).

D'Aubuisson certainly did not have an explicit or formative backing by the legislative branch in the U.S. by any means. His extremism made him generally unpopular as his alleged death squad ties would have undermined the U.S.'s outspoken commitment to a fair democracy that upholds human rights. However, Congress certainly displayed its commitment to "rolling back" leftist aggression through its regular approval of military aid to El Salvador's government, despite claims that it, too, did not make efforts regarding the progression of human rights. This presented a situation favorable to D'Aubuisson—if policy stayed focus on curbing the left, which he was dedicated to, as well, he would remain outside of U.S. targets.

U.S. party lines certainly played a role, as well. In a 1990 Congressional record, Democratic Representative Gerry Studds voiced support for a bill that would increase aid cuts to El Salvador if both the government and FMLN were not held accountable for violence. Republican House Representative Dan Burton responded in opposition, emphasizing that the "democratically-elected government in El Salvador is threatened by the communist FMLN" (*Congressional Record - House,* 101st Congress). The bill in question passed in the Democratic Majority of the House, falling roughly along party

lines. Though opinions did not always fall strictly along party lines, Congressional records during this time period displayed Republicans' general emphasis on combatting communism amid debates regarding accountability of the Salvadoran military in leveraging aid. The anti-communist focus of U.S. foreign policy created an environment in which government officials were arguably more open to supporting the likes of people such as D'Aubuisson versus any leaders associated with the left.

D'Aubuisson was well-received only among some conservative members. Though his visa was denied three times between 1980 and 1984, the Reagan administration's invitation of D'Aubuisson after El Salvador's presidential elections included a 90-minute session with a small number of Republican senators and only Democratic senator. Republicans in attendance openly and unabashedly advocated for D'Aubuisson. One Senator accused D'Aubuisson's critics of "stacking the rhetorical deck against him" in accusations of death squad associations, describing negative sentiment as "cheap, left-wing McCarthyism" (Smith). "It's the same old story," the senator said, "you repeat a big lie often enough, then people begin to believe it…there is no proof of it…the CIA doesn't have any proof, no one does" (Smith). There was perhaps no member of Congress who advocated more fervently for D'Aubuisson than Republican Senator Jesse Helms, who was seen as a "friend and ally" to D'Aubuisson (Bonner). He claimed in a 1984 Senatorial record that the CIA funneled money to the PDC in the 1984 elections. He believed the PDC was associated with leftist guerillas, saying that Duarte had ties to Marxist-Leninism

and that voter suppression against the right in El Salvador was pervasive (*Congressional record – Senate,* 101st Congress). He presented evidence claiming D'Aubuisson was "stigmatized" as the far-right, claiming that Washington "must be absolutely clear, communism is the enemy in Central America" and that there was "no substitute for military victory over the Communist forces" (*Congressional Record – Senate,* 101st Congress).

Many Congressional leaders subsequently voiced favorable views on D'Aubuisson, and it was not limited to Republican members. D'Aubuisson did well at presenting himself, but it also helped that the leader received $200,000 worth of PR from the U.S. advertising agency McCann-Erickson for his 1982 campaign (Lafeber 14). Former House Majority Leader James C. Wright of Texas described D'Aubuisson as "an intense, keyed-up young man" after sitting next to him at post-election dinner at El Salvador's U.S. Embassy in 1982 (McGory). "I believed him when he said he wants a government of national reconciliation" Wright continued, "He says he will offer amnesty to the guerrillas in all cases except crimes involving murder and kidnapping…[he said] those could not forgo punishment" (McGory). There is no record of D'Aubuisson granting amnesty to any guerilla member during his tenure as Assembly president. Wright's assessment, however, only added to the growing tolerance of D'Aubuisson as a forceful presence in El Salvador's political sphere.

The U.S. was not responsible for D'Aubuisson's actions; however, given the knowledge of him and his associations, the government certainly played a role in allowing his continued operations. The message was clear from the U.S.: communism must be stopped. Though the right was not the only side to commit serious abuses, it was implicitly permitted to continue. Little was done by the U.S. to stop right-wing forces, and this granted D'Aubuisson an uninhibited path to maintain his leadership role in El Salvador.

Part Three: The War's End

Cristiani and ARENA's Transition

After D'Aubuisson's defeat in the presidential elections in 1984, he subsequently resigned from party leader of ARENA in March of 1985. "I asked to be replaced, and although there was some resistance, the party later understood my decision" he stated in a December 1985 interview ("ARENA's D'Aubuisson Replaced by Cristiani"). Months later, successful coffee oligarch and U.S.-educated businessman Alfredo Cristiani was voted to replace Roberto D'Aubuisson as Secretary General (the highest position) of the party. This exchange of power marked a new transition for ARENA as Cristiani was then elected party leader in 1986. As accusations of D'Aubuisson's associations became pervasive, as well as his extremist ideals, ARENA leaders, along with D'Aubuisson himself, felt the party needed a new candidate for the next round of presidential

elections. D'Aubuisson was consistently attacked by the PDC and far left for his political and military past. It was clear that attempts for ARENA to achieve the highest political office could not rest under the explicit leadership of D'Aubuisson. The party wanted control, and D'Aubuisson had too many allegations against him. Whether he truly made the decision to resign himself or was forced out of the party is unknown, but the former remains likely. In the 1985 interview, he described how he "asked the assembly to analyze [their] current situation, the convenience of replacing certain leaders…to allow for a better organization and leadership of the party" ("ARENA's D'Aubuisson Replaced by Cristiani"). He was named "Honorary President for Life" and remained active in the party through its political and military training sectors.

At the core of D'Aubuisson's beliefs regarding El Salvador was the pursuit for suppressing communist rule. While his party's explicit leadership fell unto a new, fresh political voice, he remained adamant that this was what the party needed to move forward successfully. "It is not fair to hurt the entire organization when they are only trying to hurt me," D'Aubuisson explained regarding the transition (Contreras). It was important to have a leader who did "not have the past that could be used by the PDC to attack ARENA" (Contreras). He stated how accusations greatly increased near elections, and it was best for the party that he does not remain in his position. However, he certainly did not lose his status in ARENA and El Salvador as a prominent and influential leader. One of ARENA's key objectives was to establish a political institute to train young

men, youths, and political leaders, and he remained dedicated to helping the party expand. Armando Calderón Sol, leader of an ARENA faction and a deputy in the Legislative Assembly, stated that "D'Aubuisson continues to be the symbol of anti-communism in El Salvador and the entire continent" (Contreras). D'Aubuisson did not lose the confidence of ARENA, only his title in the party.

Cristiani's ascension into ARENA proved to be successful for the party. He expressed similar core views to D'Aubuisson in economic and social policy—he remained committed to privatization of the National Bank, promoting business in El Salvador, and curbing FMLN influence. However, key to his role as ARENA's leader and eventual presidential candidate was a greater willingness to negotiate with the left and enact a more moderate approach to policy. Cristiani stressed the need to "set aside partisanship, arrogance, and divisionism," while still espousing D'Aubuisson's historical calls for "national unity" ("ARENA Discusses"). He took a similar approach towards criticizing the Christian Democrats, saying their party's leader President Duarte was "putting on a tasteless political show" as "time [was] going by and he has not done anything for the people yet" ("ARENA Head Criticizes"). Cristiani focused on pursuing a "clean, democratic" presidential election, yet ensured that, despite differences with the PDC, "ARENA would support the laws announced by President Duarte that benefit the nation and see to it that they are implemented" ("ARENA Discusses").

As Cristiani denounced Duarte yet voiced support for cooperation when it best supported the Salvadoran people, ARENA was able to express a more realistic image for unification amongst the people and gain a greater following that led to successful 1988 legislative election results. It helped, additionally, that the PDC was facing significant challenges to the party's strength. The economic policies it implemented proved to fail in the country, and there was no progress in terms of peace talks with the FMLN. Additionally, with a right-wing majority in the Legislative Assembly, the Assembly pushed for corruption investigations that proved there was at least some degree of corruption in the PDC-dominated government (Montgomery 218). This weakened their following amongst the Salvadoran people, and as disagreements arose within the PDC regarding presidential candidates, leading members eventually split off to form new parties. With President Duarte diagnosed with stomach and liver cancer, the PDC no longer maintained the following and leadership strength it once did. When the presidential elections in 1989 came, ARENA came out with 56% of popular vote, and Alfredo Cristiani was named El Salvador's new executive leader (Montgomery 215).

D'Aubuisson's plan worked magnificently. The moderate image that Cristiani provided for ARENA gave them power over the government, and D'Aubuisson maintained significant power over the party itself. He remained at Cristiani's side on the campaign trail, often inserting himself at events and chose ARENA's vice-presidential candidate, Francisco Merino (Montgomery 213). In his inauguration address, Cristiani

outlined a five-point plan for peace talks with the FMLN, a position supported by 76% of Salvadorans at the time (Montgomery 216). D'Aubuisson himself supported this line of action, and even released a detailed proposal for conducting FMLN talks that Cristiani's administration would later put into place. "We need to hold ongoing dialogue for the duration of these negotiations," D'Aubuisson stated in a 1989 interview, "anyone who lays down his weapons will be allowed to sign the amnesty" ("D'Aubuisson Announces"). While he certainly remained an impassioned believer against the influence of communism, his actions led ARENA to a position that gained them control over El Salvador.

Peace Negotiations

The road to peace was long for El Salvador. With President Cristiani finally getting to the table with the FMLN in September of 1989, there would not be a cease-fire in El Salvador for another two years. U.N.-brokered talks occurred twice times before the end of 1989, and both sides called for a cease-fire to end the war by January of 1990. However, bombings on the homes of prominent center-left leaders, churches, and El Salvador's largest trade union federation occurred only days after their second meeting in October. President Cristiani promised for a full investigation of the attacks, but none occurred. This signaled to the FMLN that the government was not serious about laying down their arms and prompted a continuation of their offensives. Death squad violence

sharply increased as well, and it seemed that El Salvador was nowhere close to seeing the end of conflict.

The 1991 Legislative elections proved to incite violence even further. As the global collapse of communism occurred, ARENA saw the possible exponential increase in their power. President Cristiani's Deputy Chief of Staff claimed that they were "looking not only at one or two more terms, but a longer period of domination for a center-right party" (Norton). However, this positive outlook did not prevent the party from committing massive fraud, as it had already been proven to do in previous elections. Leftist sympathizers were threatened, fired from jobs, beaten up, and their offices were frequently surrounded by troops and bombed (Norton). The Democratic National Unity's candidate and his pregnant wife were threatened to be killed if he did not resign from the race; days later, they were machine-gunned to death. Another National Unity candidate was shot in the eye by an ARENA gunman (Norton). On election day, the ARENA-dominated Central Elections Council changed polling places at the last minute in areas with strong Christian Democrat support, while also delivering ballot boxes late and causing them to open hours after voting officially began. Tens of thousands of names also disappeared from the voting lists, so many who had registered voting cards were not allowed to vote. ARENA won many towns that were slated to do well among the center-left by margins as small as 200 votes (Norton). One Latin American diplomat stated directly that "ARENA did everything possible to obstruct the vote of the

opposition" and political analysts in the region indicated that "there was clearly fraud" (Norton). However, the official U.S. observation team for the election, which sent only 160 observers compared to the 700 sent to Nicaragua's elections despite the country only having half of El Salvador's population, declared the election "free and fair" (Norton). Though it received 10% less votes than it did in 1989, it still came out with the largest share of the popular vote and retained its control over the Assembly through its continued alliance with the right-wing PCN.

Peace talks resumed after the elections, but both sides seemed to be in a deadlock. The biggest issue facing progression was ARENA's unwillingness to make concessions regarding the National Guard, a position which D'Aubuisson was specifically accused of spearheading (Montomgery 230). Without the power of the military to enforce the right-wing's position, the true control it maintained over the country was lost. Thus, it refused to move forward. "There's a complete lack of understanding in the party of the need to make concessions," one Western diplomat remarked, "there's an utter conviction in the government and the U.S. that the FMLN is effectively beat…the government, the right, the army, and even the U.S. are believing their own propaganda again" (Norton). Without pressure from the U.S. to make concessions, peace talks were near impossible. One foreign analyst noted that, although many U.S. officials were critical of the military, "their hatred for the FMLN is so great they end up supporting the army" (Norton). However, despite the global turn away from communism, the FMLN had

proven by 1991 to be ideologically distant from Marxism, with leaders denouncing much of its tenets. The FMLN guerillas had grown stronger and more sophisticated and was not likely to just "disappear" as many Salvadoran officials believed.

Despite ARENA's legislative success and the U.S.'s continued support for El Salvador's government, it was clear that peace must be achieved. Violence still occurred at great rates, and Cristiani finally made some concessions regarding the military, electoral systems, and the creation of United Nations Truth Commission to investigate human rights abuses. Unsurprisingly, many right-wing death squads and anticommunist groups reacted violently, issuing threats against those who supported the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador and continuing murders and disappearance against civilians (Montgomery 224). However, international pressure from Spain, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia pushed President Cristiani to move further with talks with the FMLN, and D'Aubuisson himself made what would be his last public speech urging ARENA to support Cristiani and the peace process (Montgomery 224). Both sides gave concessions, and finally on December 31st both sides participated in an unofficial cease-fire. On January 16, 1992, formal peace accords were signed in Chapultepec, Mexico, and a formal cease-fire began on February 1st. The National Guard became the National Civilian Police, and the FMLN became an official political party. Two weeks later, Roberto D'Aubuisson died from tongue and throat cancer, having seen his party achieve the peace he had called for since 1979.

Part Four: Weaknesses of the Salvadoran State

Roberto D'Aubuisson maintained massive influence during El Salvador's Civil War. His role as an extreme yet charismatic leader proved to gather support for him and his political party, ARENA. While D'Aubuisson's greatest achievement is arguably the creation of a party still dominant in the present-day, the circumstances he took advantage of and the tactics that he employed during the war reveal a greater legacy: exposure of the core issues that have plagued El Salvador to this day. The economic, security, and political problems that were never addressed after the war's end and have prevented the country from achieving great peace and prosperity are revealed in looking at D'Aubuisson's rise to power.

Politically

In looking at D'Aubuisson's political role in El Salvador, there are distinct facets that hindered El Salvador before, during, and after the war. D'Aubuisson contributed directly and indirectly to these facets, but overall, he exemplified some of the key political issues in the country that were not addressed in the 1992 Peace Accords. Corruption was rampant in the country and two major political parties, ARENA and FMLN, dominated Salvadoran politics until the 2019 election of independent candidate Nayib Bukele.

When Roberto D'Aubuisson founded ARENA in 1981, he envisioned a long-lasting presence of the party in El Salvador. Whether it was the timing of the party's founding, coming in during a period without a strong right-wing coalition, or D'Aubuisson's own leadership, or some combination of factors that placed ARENA as the largest political party in El Salvador, it resulted in a 20-year presidential reign. ARENA won every election from 1989-2009 and had the largest percentage of Legislative Assembly seats from 1988-2000, coming in second only from 2003-2012 and regaining the majority in 2015 and 2018. It remains El Salvador's largest right-wing party. However, ARENA's associations with corruption and election fraud did not stop with D'Aubuisson's death in 1992. One of the major associations of the party has been with gangs, with which ARENA has been known to "strike pacts" allowing extortion and execution of rival politicians (Zaidi). Bribes have also been pervasive for both ARENA and the FMLN. Additionally, at least two former ARENA presidents have been convicted of embezzlement and money laundering. The party's current leader was also arrested in August of 2020 for the same charges (Patricio). ARENA is not the only party with connections to corruption, however; a former FMLN president was indicted for embezzlement as well. Allegations of corruption have run rampant against both the FMLN and ARENA, and while most have gone uninvestigated and unproven, it is clear that the formidable presence of both parties is tainted with the same civil war-era fraudulency.

Arguably D'Aubuisson's biggest revelation for El Salvador's political sphere was his polarizing rhetoric to the Salvadoran people. Though wartime conditions naturally created a stark division among left and right-wing supporters, D'Aubuisson's condemnation of the left, and creation of a political party centered around combatting leftist thought, heightened El Salvador's already significantly polarized population. The country remains one of Latin America's most polarized countries today. In a 2016 research study, El Salvador ranked highest in party polarization compared to 17 other Latin American countries (Singer 182). While it is easy to look at D'Aubuisson's rhetoric during the war as largely a product of Cold War sentiments, it was extremely telling of the divide of the left and right ideologies in El Salvador that had never been properly rectified. After the Peace Accords, the country continued to be as polarized as ever. This polarization has magnified challenges to address important security and policing challenges in the country as it has prevented the two sides to come together to enact formidable, bipartisan policies (*Country Report*).

Historical precedence of division between the left and right in El Salvador certainly indicates that polarization had already existed for decades; however, analysis of D'Aubuisson's rhetoric and political action simply sheds greater light on its prominence in the country. A 2018 Congressional Research report stated explicitly that "ARENA sought to rebuild democracy…but did not effectively address inequality, violence, and corruption" (Seelke). If government officials had looked not at subduing the opposition

but cooperating to enact policy, the country may have been able to better address many of the dire situations it has faced since then.

Security and the Judicial System

Throughout the war, D'Aubuisson placed great emphasis on the need for the Salvadoran armed forces. He believed that these forces were key to subduing the leftist guerillas, espousing the idea that they could be fully trusted to act for the Salvadoran people and should receive unwavering support. The issue, he argued, rest within those in control of the government itself. He created alliances with military officials and utilized them as part of his paramilitary death squad operations. This coalition also extended into the country's judicial system, where army officials who were charged with crimes rarely saw punitive action or even trials. D'Aubuisson's arrest and quick release is only one of numerous instances in which military members walked free. Many never saw charges made against them to begin with. These issues within the judicial and military systems have also been exacerbated by U.S. support. While significantly less military aid is sent compared to wartime years, which has arguably contributed to the difficulties of the police to gain proper training, there is still a trend of U.S. aid funding questionable areas of El Salvador's policing force.

D'Aubuisson's military coalition was key in his rise to power, and also reveals a significant downfall in El Salvador that has yet to be properly addressed: the country's

judicial system and the government's lack of control over security forces. In the UN's 1993 Truth Commission Report on El Salvador's war, authors stated blatantly that "the lack of effective action by the judicial system…reinforced the impunity that shielded and continues to shield members and promoters of death squads" (Betancur). A 2018 US Department of State report states a similar assessment, that "impunity persists despite government steps to dismiss and prosecute officials who had committed abuses…partially due to inefficiency and corruption in the judiciary" (*Country Report*). The judiciary system, along with the National Civilian Police, has gone underfunded, and there are serious concerns regarding corruption in the police, prisons, and judicial system as a whole (Seelke). Since the disbandment of the National Guard in 1992, the Civilian Police has remained underfunded and undertrained. There is a large disparity between previous funding for the National Guard and current funding for the Civilian Police, however; the National Guard had previously operated with over $1 billion in military aid from the U.S. between 1980 and 1990, or approximately $100 million per year (*El Salvador: Military Assistance* 2). Though it has certainly varied by year in the past decades, in 2019 the military received approximately $19 million in aid ("U.S. Foreign Aid"). The National Guard and armed forces spent a decade building up their arsenal and training with U.S. funds, and without the same funding for the Civilian Police it is not surprising to see security forces revert back to historical trends of violence and corruption. With deficient wages, training, and infrastructure, "corruption, weak

investigatory capacity, and an inability to prosecute officers accused of corruption and human rights abuses have hindered police performance" (Seelke).

The lack of a properly organized, funded, and trained policing and judicial system has exacerbated issues regarding gang-related violence. As gang-violence has greatly contributed to the country's high homicide rates in the decades since the war, the government has maintained a hard emphasis on aggressive anti-gang policies amongst security forces. Implemented by ARENA presidents, La Mano Dura ("Firm Hand") and Super Mano Dura ("Super Firm Hand") instigated a zero-tolerance policy for gangs, leading to "the immediate imprisonment of a gang member simply for having gang-related tattoos or flashing gang signs in public" (Rodgers). The original policy resulted in tens of thousands of gang members as young as 12 years old imprisoned and was subsequently ruled unconstitutional (Rodgers). The second form of the strategy was highly criticized by the UN and human rights groups and was replaced upon the election of the country's first FMLN president, who attempted to instill gang suppression laws and a Mano Amiga ("Helping Hand") policy that went largely underfunded and proved to be ineffective (Wolf).

The inconsistent and aggressive policies towards gangs have led to exacerbated human rights abuses by the country's underpaid and undertrained security forces. The rise in gang violence also led to a 2009 authorization of the military to carry out police functions, a decree which is still in place today. According to U.S. estimates, 8,000 of El

Salvador's 17,000 active-duty armed forces are involved in public security at any given time (Seelke). The use of private security for protection from gangs has increased as well. The anti-gang policies and military involvement has led to an increase in extrajudicial killings and maltreatment of suspected gang members. In 2017, four police officers and ten soldiers were arrested under suspected involvement in 36 murders between 2014 and 2016 (Seelke). The same year, evidence was released that death squads were operating within the police, leading to convictions of at least six officers for participating in these death squads (Seelke). However, 96% of investigations against Salvadoran police are dismissed in the first 72 hours, with few resulting in convictions ("US-Funded Police").

U.S. complacency towards the human rights abuses committed by government forces did not necessarily disappear with the National Guard. The U.S. increased aid in the early 2000's in support of El Salvador's Mano Dura policy towards gangs, and there has been links to U.S. funding units within El Salvador's police that commit extrajudicial killings of gang members. One unit allegedly killed 43 members in the first six months of 2018, and though it was disbanded, members created a new unit of the same caliber; both units received U.S. funding ("US-Funded Police"). Unit officers have confirmed U.S. training as well, leading to the growing question of whether it is complicit in the actions for the sake of subduing gang forces.

In assessing the issues that plague El Salvador's security and judicial systems, it is not hard to see the origins of these difficulties. Historically, El Salvador's military coalition with the oligarchy led to decades of military rule. The independent power of the National Guard was expansive, often undermining the presidential leadership of military officials themselves. It was clear during the war that this power went unmanaged and unaddressed, as D'Aubuisson took advantage of in furthering his own pursuits for the country's right wing. After the war's end, the creation of a Civilian Police incorporated all sides of El Salvador, including former insurgents, former police, and non-combatants, to create an independent law enforcement agency under civilian control and separate from the armed forces. The purpose of these forces was to set hard expectations regarding human rights and avoid the dangerous use of military force on civilians. However, this has proven to change little in the country. The abuses committed by the National Guard had been justified as stopping leftist guerillas; now, it is justified as stopping the gangs. In 2016 the Director General of the Civilian Police, Mauricio Landaverde, stated that "all members of the PNC that have to use weapons against criminals due to their work as officers should do so with complete confidence…the government and the PNC will protect them" (Olson). D'Aubuisson expressed similar sentiment when regarding the armed forces actions against leftist guerillas. The structure of security, the funding of the judicial system, and a seeming belief that crime

can only be subdued by increased force, were all issues thirty years ago that have yet to be properly addressed.

Economic Disparity

One of D'Aubuisson's most important alliances was with the wealthy Salvadoran oligarchs and landowners. The income inequality preceding the war only worsened as the economy plummeted during the war, and D'Aubuisson's economic policies, while certainly shifting in focus depending upon the income levels of the crowds he spoke to, blatantly promoted the reinvigoration of the private sector in El Salvador. The focus remained on boosting the economy through increasing the wealth of El Salvador's richest, rather than addressing disparities impacting lower classes. This has led the country into a difficult economic situation and has also given way to the spread of gangs in lower income areas.

Since the war's end, income disparity has certainly decreased. However, throughout the 1990s poverty rates remained above fifty percent, and did not fall below forty percent until 2012 (103). Today, a third of the population remains below the poverty line ("El Salvador Poverty Rate 1989-2020"). The highest percentage of poverty, however, remains amongst the rural areas in the country. A 2015 report assessed the 58.5% of all rural households, which make up thirty percent of the nation's population, suffered from deprivations associated with poverty (Seelke). Natural disasters and

droughts that have plagued the country throughout the last two decades have limited the country's economic growth as well. Political polarization has severely impacted the ability of the government to enact expansive economic policies. While the country has experienced economic growth compared to 1992 rates, it relies heavily on foreign aid and remittances from workers in other countries, primarily the U.S. (Seelke). The education of the labor force is also severely impacted—adequate education and training to meet the country's labor needs is severely lacking, contributing to low economic growth (Seelke).

One of the biggest factors impacting El Salvador's economic growth is security issues related to gang violence. The principal way they receive funding is through the extortion of businesses, requiring daily amounts of $2-$3 for small-businesses and $5-$20 for medium-sized businesses and distributors (Zaidi). The result is the extortion of seventy percent of the country's businesses, resulting in estimated revenues of over $30 million per year going to a single gang (Zaidi). The money spent due to gangs and the money lost due to violence amounts to $15 billion, or 15% of the country's GDP (Zaidi). It is a cycle, however; gangs have grown more pervasive in lower-income areas, usually gaining the membership of youth who suffer from unemployment, family separation, scarce educational opportunities, and poverty (Fogelbach). The country has certainly come a long way in addressing income disparities, but with low economic growth it is

hard for a large portion of the population to see increases in wealth. Gangs have taken advantage of these impoverished areas, allowing their influence and power to spread.

Conclusion

Roberto D'Aubuisson was a charismatic manipulator, who took advantage of the problems in El Salvador to rise to prominence. In many ways, he exacerbated certain issues, such as political polarization and emphasis on the military; in others, he was simply representative of larger problems, such as the income inequality and U.S. complacency towards actors espousing similar beliefs. While D'Aubuisson is not solely responsible for the conflict-ridden path El Salvador has experienced since the end of the war, the elements allowing his rise to power display the broader, fundamental situations that have hindered the country and its citizens. In looking at this one leader, key weaknesses within El Salvador are revealed as well as actors who have aided in their continuation. These weaknesses are certainly not finite in scope, but have had a significant, lasting impact on the country. And though it is not to say El Salvador ignored or did not work to correct many situations that D'Aubuisson's analysis revealed, oftentimes more immediate problems, like gang violence, seem to get in the way of addressing the sources of the problems themselves, like the judicial system and economic situations feeding into gangs' expansion. For other countries that have experienced long-lasting violence and conflict like El Salvador, it may be essential to

look at prominent figures in the country to find the elements that allowed them to rise to power, and work diligently to address them before situations repeat, worsen, or expand.

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